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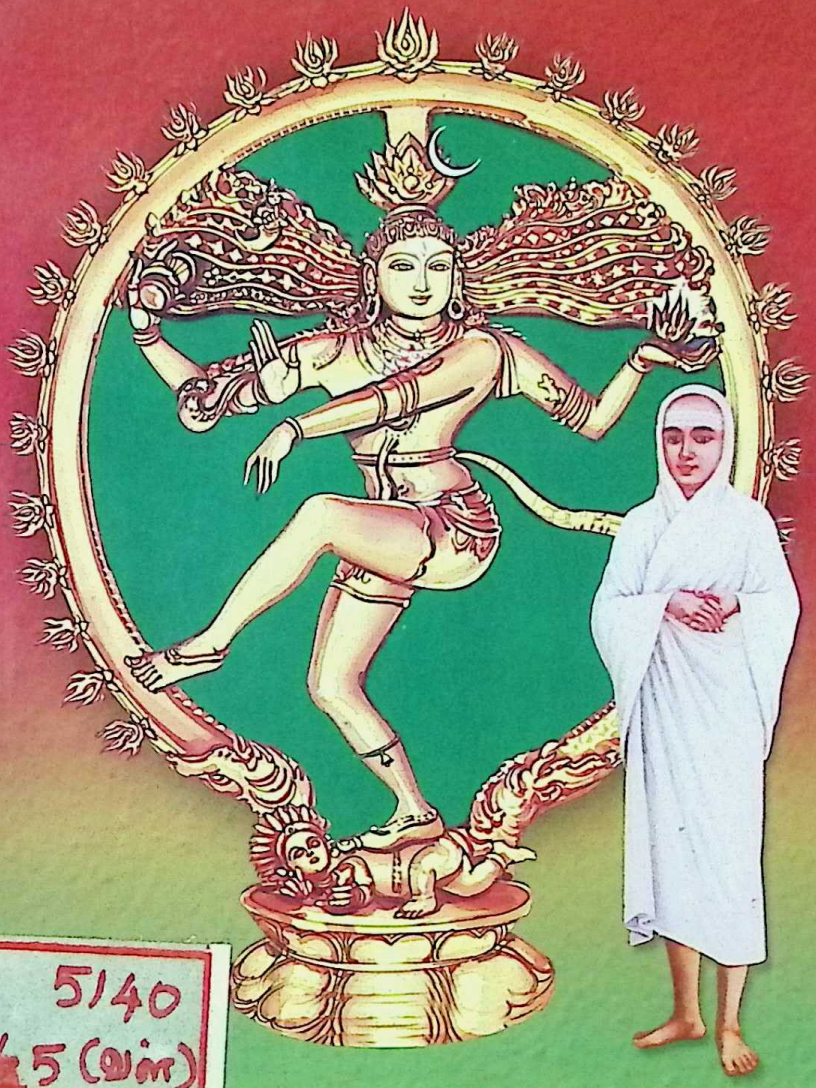
PATHWAY TO GOD TROD BY SAINT RAMALINGAR

G.VANMIKANATHAN



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(ABRIDGED EDITION)

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Foreword

(from the first unabridged edition)

It was an acute embarrassment to be asked to write a Foreword to Mr.G. Vanmikanathan's massive memoir Pathway to God, for I must confess to no more than a very superficial acquaintance with the infinitudes of mystic poetry in Tamil, including Ramalinga Swami's *Tiru Arutpa*, which is the immediate subject of the present memoir. On the other hand, it was also a challenging invitation to God-experience, with all its predictable upsets, uncertainties, agonies, exhilarations and realizations. Let me record at the outset my gratitude to the author for making me spend several days to self-absorption oscillating between his highly sensitive English renderings from the *Tiru Arutpa* and the relevant passages in the original, between his total dedication to his task and the splendour of Ramalinga's poesy and ministry that had inspired the task. It has been a singular education for me, a fresh entry into the inner countries of the Spirit.

* * *

Pathway to God, Mr. Vanmikanathan's latest work, is essentially the spiritual biography of Ramalinga Swami, and is told largely in the words of Ramalinga himself. After all, in the life of an illumined ecstatic and God-intoxicated singer like Ramalinga, of what importance are the so-called 'external' facts and dates? The inner history, the soul's travail, the adventures in God-realisation - these alone are the heart of the matter. This 'inner life' was a journey and a quest, a protracted struggle with its vicissitudes of failure and success, gloom and ecstasy. It was also a full circle from Thillai to Muruga at Kandakottam and on to Tiruttani Muruga and

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Tyagesar at Tiruvottriyur and back again to Thillai Nataraja. The 'external' events are like vague sign-posts, and they throw but little light on the movement of the underground waters of the spirit. This is the reason why Mr. Vanmikanathan covers the 'facts and dates' - the 'bio data' - in the course of a few pages and devotes the rest of the book to the inner history of the man and of the man of God.

* * *

The definitive edition of *Tiru Arutpa* by Ooran Adigal in 1972 was a landmark in Ramalinga studies, because it arranged the songs and the song-sequences for the first time in their strict chronological order. This has helped Mr. Vanmikanathan to follow Ramalinga Swami's progress, not only through year to year of his life, but also through the several stages of his spiritual journey in their chronological order.

At all times, the *nayaki-nayaka-bhava* is for a poet something of a razor's edge; a slip could be perilous and fatal. Quintessentially it is a way of journeying - or cantering - from the known and the familiar to the unknown and the mysterious. The hunger of the human soul for God is conveyed through the symbolic figure of Radha pining for and seeking out Krishna, and in poems like Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda,* all erotic imagery is valid to bring out the sequence of the first sudden onset of love and union, the subsequent separation and deprivation and passionate longing, and the culminating ecstatic reunion - in fact, the whole drama of what Sri Aurobindo has called "the *lila* of the love of the human spirit for God". By its very nature, the pull of the human soul towards Siva, of *Pasu* for *Pati*, of Ramalinga for Nataraja, evokes erotic imagery to a less sensuous degree perhaps than the Radha-Krishna relationship. Even so, the poems in *Tiru Arutpa* cast in the *nayaki-*

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nayaka-bhava are of variegated richness and comprehend the entire gamut of the music of bridal mysticism. In translation as well as in commentary, Mr. Vanmikanathan has, however, cultivated a delicate touch, always enhancing the theme, never making it of the earth earthy.

One other point: Ramalinga Swami was not merely a great mystic and a God-gifted singer, he was also acutely conscious of the contemporary human situation, the iniquities of the social organization, the cruelties of man to man, the obliquities of the fallen human condition. Pain, want, injustice - anywhere or in any form - distressed him, and in his hearts' agony he cried out again and again:

Every time I saw crops withering,
I withered too; as often
as I saw hungry destitute beggars,
I too fainted with hunger,
The sight of chronic victims of disease
made me tremble like a leaf,
and the defeat of the meritorious
has made me wilt in pain...
Compassion has overwhelmed me as oft
as I've mixed with living beings.
In distress I've petitioned You for help,
as I do again today.
My life's run and soul of compassion are one,
not wholly different things.
My life must cease when my compassion dies
I swear this at Your feet.

The institutions he founded in his own life - Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Satya Sabha, Satya Dharmasala, Satya Gnana Sabha - were meant to translate his humane social insights and anxieties into practical as well as spiritual terms. He was a tireless

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castigator of all profession without practice, all false assumption of superiority based on birth, class, status or privilege alone, all blind superstition and ritual, all bigotry and hypocrisy, all avarice and ostentation. And yet what gave the accent of apostolic authority to his animadversions and denunciations was his own personal purity, his radiant sincerity, his decisive ascent into sanctity.

* * *

Ramalinga was truly a man of God, he was the living embodiment of the wisdom and love of God, he was the very personation of the concept of Arut-perum-Jyoti that filled so much of his thought and writing and ministry. It is the cardinal merit of Mr. Vanmikanathan's book that Ramalinga the man of God, the witness Spirit, the angel and ambassador of Arut-perum-Jyoti always holds the center of the stage.

Certainly, Ramalinga's is the story of a god-man in its progressive manifestation, and is hence a single or integral piece. But for the reader's sake, Mr. Vanmikanathan has parceled out the story into chapters, beginning with 'A Child Laughs', which is a reference to Ramalinga's first mystic experience as a child of five months-

When my mother took me as a baby
to the sanctum at Thillai
You revealed to me, as the curtain rose,
all the transcendental Truth;
Sheer God-knowledge ripened in my nonage,
O my soul's sap and home!

to 'Anubhava Malai' (the last chapter), which contains a complete verse rendering of Ramalinga's culminating poetic recordation, on the eve of his withdrawal on 30

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January 1874, of his unitive experience of God as Nataraja, as Arut-perum-Jyoti. By deliberate intention, much of the story is made up of choice renderings from Ramalinga's own poetic outpourings. And here Mr. Vanmikanathan is from time to time seized by a sense of inadequacy bordering on despair:

> "Again and again I feel that I should give up translating these songs. Their music, their melody, their cadence, their alliterative sonance, their metrical ebb and flow, all are lost in a translation".

On the other hand, Mr. Vanmikanathan has evidently lived and loved for months - perhaps for years- in the surge and music of the *Tiru Arutpa:* he has been hearing the parallel strains in *Tiruvasagam*, *Tevaram*, *Tirumandiram* and other classics of Tamil Saiva mystic poetry: he has heard echoes of the musings of many a Western and Oriental mystic; and thanks to this discipline, this sadhana of total taken as a whole, his translations achieve a satisfying fidelity to the original that is most commendable. He is generally close enough to the original in intention and imagery, and the renderings, in their sweeps of thought and feet of rhythmic movement, sound natural enough to ears attuned to English poetry.

* * *

Pathway to God is thus not a book to be read in a hurry or at one stretch, even as the scaling of a Himalayan summit is not to be accomplished in one leap. Faith and patience and an inner opening are called for, but then the recompense will be incommensurable.

"Matri Bhavan"
91, Kutchery Road,
Mylapore, Madras-4.

K.R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

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Publisher's Note

The depthness and profundity of Indian Spiritual Culture could be fathomed only through the life and teachings of godly saints and Siddha-masters, who, by their incarnation, have purified and energized the entire stretch of our Bharath. The greatness of such high souled saintly masters is well established by their unabated guidance and grace even after the cessation of their physical existence. It is wrong to assume that such saints remained dissociated from the frontiers of human society. Beyond doubt, they have evinced their motherly care and concern for the society as well as the environment. The best example is the stream called Papanasini Ganga and the gardens created anew by Bhagavan Nityananda in a place known as Guruvan near Mangalore. The trees planted by him and the stream created by him are still there benefiting both the people and the environment. Many such incidences could be cited. The same kind of motherly care has been evinced by Vallalar.

Arutprakasa Vallalar, Ramalinga Swamigal belongs to the time-honoured lineage of Siddhas. He has enriched not only the Tamil language but also the simple path meant for the truth seekers. His mellifluous hymns and songs are richly loaded with eternal principles, messages of everlasting significance and concepts of spiritual and cosmic sciences. His works are the unfailing guidance to every seeker and to every system. To what extent a seeker could be benefited from the works of Arutprakasa

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Vallalar lies in the fact how genuinely and deeply he understands the inner import of each verse composed by Vallalar.

Thiru Vanmikanathan, who had gone deep into the works of Arutprakasa Vallalar, has authored the present book titled "Pathway to God trod by Saint Ramalingar" a title modeled by no less a person than Gurudev Ranade. The earlier unabridged edition of this book was brought out by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in the year 1976. The book was claimed to be the most comprehensive translation of Saint Ramalinga Swamigal's poems so far available to those readers who were not conversant with Tamil.

Realising the importance and need of this work, the second edition is now brought out in a select and abridged way without foregoing the essential features of the first edition.

It is heartening to note that our contemporary society has become awakened to know and adhere to the unfailing and impeccable path of Universal love and compassion laid down by Vallalar in his own unique way. We do hope that the present edition will be most useful to the awakened and inspired members of human society.

N. Mahalingam

Chennai
23.8.04

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Saint Ramalingar

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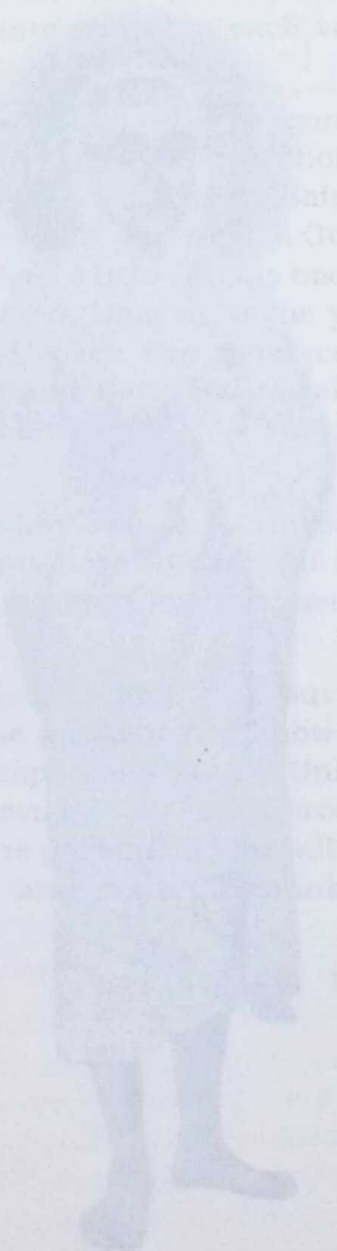

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1. A CHILD LAUGHS

A child not more than five moons old laughed a toothless laugh of sheer delight, its baby face lighted up with a unique illumination born of an ineffable experience.

Raamaiyan and Chinnammai had taken their fifth child of five moons to the temple of Nataraajaa in Chidambaram. After the darsan of Lord Nataraajaa, they moved to their left for the darsan of Chidambara Rahasyam - the Mystery of mysteries - which is covered with a curtain, which is lifted at every one of the six services in a day to give the devotees a darsan of this holy of holies, this Mystery in which Saint Manikkavaachakar merged in a blaze of light. As the Civaachaaryaa, the officiant for that day, reverently lifted the curtain veiling the mystery, and the devotees looked on with wonder and ecstasy, the child in the crook of the left arm of Chinnammai crowed with ecstatic delight. This was the very first occasion on which the child has been taken to the temple and then there itself a unique rapport was established between the infant and Lord Nataraajaa which was to last for the entire life-time of that infant on this earth, a rapport which was to draw that same infant in later years with an irresistible pull all the way from Thiruvotriyoor near Madras to that self-same Chidambaram - Thillai to all the long line of devotees - and to that self-same Lord Nataraajaa, a rapport which was to inspire that child grown into man to sing hundreds of songs in

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praise of Nataraajaa dripping with love, devotion, adoration, self-abnegation and unqualified total surrender, a rapport which was to lead the child half-a-century later to merge in that same ether in the 19th century in as dramatic a manner as even Manikkavaachakar merged in that ether, which is the Godhead, sixteen centuries earlier.

What made the child laugh? That child itself, in his later years of mature manhood, in the fullness of the apprehension of the Godhead, in a not-to-be-disbelieved freshness of recollection, tells us what made it laugh with delight. He sings:

Oh being, my true Kin,
Who showed to me everything
as the (space and time transcending) ether
instead of the usual ceiling
when I, in my infancy,
along with my mother and others,
witnessed (the Mystery of mysteries)
in the sacred town of Thillai
when the veiling curtain was lifted!
Oh Sweet Fruit Who have mellowed in my heart
without going through the stage of unripe fruit!
Oh effulgent Nataraajaa
Who dance in the Hall of Gems
while the pure ones stand around adoring You!
Do graciously wear
My (garland of) words also.

4133.VI.57 arul vilakka maalai 44

That child was Raamalingam.

It is said that, one day, at noon, Lord Civan Himself came to the doors of Raamaiyaa's house in

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the garb of a devotee of Lord Civan and begged for food from Chinnammai. Raamaiyaa was not at home. The lady fed the devotee with all the traditional hospitality of the Tamil housewife, a hospitality of which Saint Kaaraikkaal Ammaiyaar had set a noble example for all the future housewives of Tamilnaadu to emulate. His hunger assuaged, the devotee - who was no other than Lord Civan Himself - as he took his departure, blessed Chinnammai in these words: "Oh Lady, you have assuaged Our hunger. A son will be born to you who will assuage the hunger of all the world. He will make the grace of God shine everywhere. That holy Son of Gnosis will be born in this house. The world will be redeemed by him. He is Our Son. We came today specially to announce his sacred coming. Blessed be you, blessed be you". So saying, he gave her the sacred ash, adding these words: "Receive this sacred ash which shall give you the treasure of a conception, do wear it and get your husband also to wear it". With these words he walked away from the house, and even while Chinnammai was still watching his back he vanished from sight without leaving trace of any further footsteps in the profuse dust of the street.

Raamalingam, whom we shall in future call Raamalinga Swaamikal or Vallalaar which is an abridgement of Arul Prakaasa Vallalaar, had no doubt about his mission. He sings:

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That I may bring under the fold
of the Society of the True Path (to the Godhead)
all the people of the world,
who are black at heart
but white exteriorly,
by reforming them in this world,
and that they may here on earth itself
gain the hereafter (mukti)
and rejoice,
for this sole purpose
God brought me down in this age
and I arrived here
and grace gained.

5485. VI. 128 utrathu uraithal 9.

Such divinely ordained children are called "Karuvile thiruvudaiyaar" i.e., persons who, even in their embryonic state, have had conferred Civanhood on them. These are servants chosen by God even before their birth. Epictetus says: "Surely God chooses His servants at birth, or, perhaps, before birth". Raamalinga Swaamikal was one such servant of God.

Man, common man, takes birth after birth, discharges a part of his karma, earns fresh karma and adds to his store of karma and is never freed from this vicious circle unless and until God's divine grace and the Knowledge conferred by that grace are gained. But to Raamalinga Swaamikal the birth as the son of Raamaiyaa and Chinnammai was the very last one, the birth in which he gained the state of never being born again. According to him, this birth was to redress some shortcomings in renunciation

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and some shortcomings in the apprehension of the Godhead in the life before the present one. It is called "vitta kurai, thotta kurai". He sings:

Like lotus freed from the bonds
That invest the petals of its bud,
I, freed, from all my thoughts,
contemplate You only;
I do not think of anything else,
This, of course, Oh Lord,
Who shine in the hearts of the perfect ones,
is known to your sacred heart;
why should I say anything?
I have now on this earth
filled the short-fall in renunciation
and the short-fall in my apprehension of the Godhead;
the moment has come for You to hurry forth
and graciously confer your effulgence of grace;
I boldly say so,
Other than saying that which I experience
with You making me experience,
I am not capable of saying anything
of my own accord.

3819. VI.33 civa darisanam 9

This poem was written in his mature years, in the afternoon of his life, a life too short by modern standards and even by the standards of his century. But he had this conviction, namely, that this was his last birth on earth, the birth which will preclude all future births. He gives expression to this conviction in a song sung soon after his fifth or sixth year, or, perhaps, in the ninth year. He sings:

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Is Brahma capable
of making me be born again?
(If he does so) will he not stand once again
shut up behind the bars of a prison?
Will he forget the great suffering
from the crack on the head
inflicted on a former occasion?
Yama, of the colour of night,
would he even in his dreams
think of making me die ever more?
He will not think of it;
for won't he recollect the scars on his body
which had been bruised black and blue
by the kick he had received?
Would the lurking karma come
And torment me?
I will not care a tuppence for it.
For I stand merged in Your holy Grace
which all the learned hold fast to,
Oh Kandhavel
Who flourish in the dynamic pilgrimage centre
at Kandhakottam
In Chennai where excellence (in good virtues)
is prevalent!
Oh Pure gem with faces of cool grace!
Oh Gem born of Civan of the introspective face!
Oh divine Gem with six faces!

27.I.I theiva mani maalai 27

This purposive child was born on the 5th of October 1823, a hundred and seventy nine years ago, to Raamaiyaa Pillai, a village accountant, and Chinnammai at Maruthoor, a village in South Arcot District of Tamilnaadu, about 16 kilometres down a by-road which branches off to the south of Vadaloor from the Madras-Kumbakonam Highway

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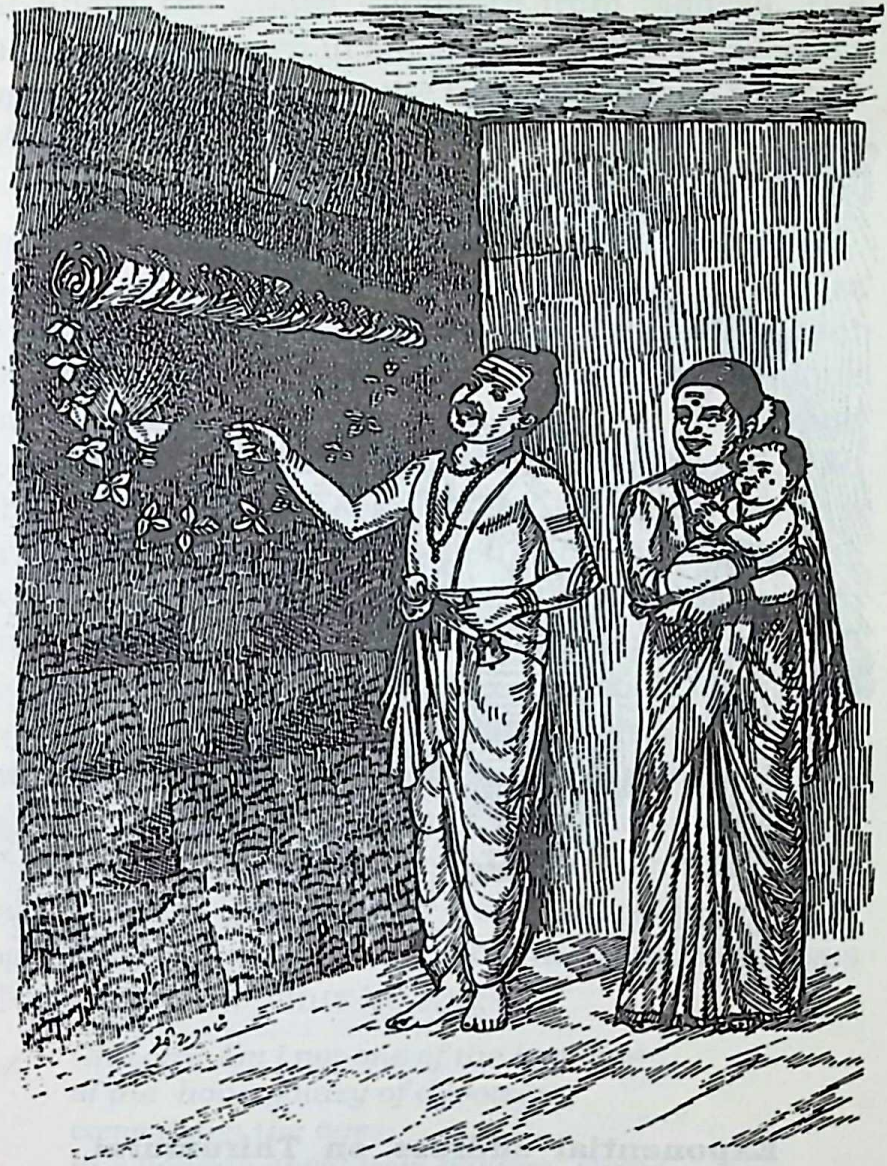

Vallalar, as a child, laughs seeing Chidambara Rahasyam

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Exponential address on Thirumurai by Vallalar as a boy

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at about the 205th kilometre from Madras. The house he was born in stood intact upto a few years ago. Now, there is only the bare plot of land where it stood.

This is the physical parentage and all too scantly genealogical tree of the child. His biographers have not given us the names of any fore fathers of the child. We know very little even about the parents. But this unique child with a unique mission has another genealogical tree, a spiritual genealogical tree that begins, to our knowledge, with the name of Thiruvalluvar in the 1st century A.D., a tree which has an unbroken line of some of the world's greatest spiritual forefathers, a line which has come down the last two milleniums and will continue for many milleniums to come, a line in which Raamalinga Swaamikal was the most noteworthy 19th century scion of the milleniums-old line of most noteworthy spiritual sons of Tamilnaadu, sons of Lord Civan, heirs to the everlasting Kingdom of God. Our saint almost aggressively lays claim to the heirdom and challenges God to deny it. Thus he sings :

Oh Lord! Am I not one of the long line
of the holy galaxy of devotees
come down the ages
like banana shoot from banana stem?
The how of it I know not.
The misery this wretch suffers,
has it the assent of your divine will?
Is this fitting?
Is this just?

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Is this righteous indeed?
Oh bounteous Lord
Who dance in the golden hall set with gems!
Son to You am I not?
And legitimate father to me are You not?
This craven world's soul-searing grief
I can no longer endure.
Graciously bestow on me Your benign light;
graciously bestow it right now.

3803. VI. 32 piriyen endral 4

The simile is worth considering seriouly. Just as it is said in English that a single swallow does not make a summer, similarly in Tamil, a woman with only one child is considered barren and is compared to the banana tree which puts forth only one sucker or shoot. By this simile, Raamalinga Swaamikal desires to emphasize the rarity of the appearance of saints who do not come in profusion but one in several centuries. It is on this account, that he asks God if the misery which he, the one and only heir, suffers has His divine assent, whether it is fitting, just, righteous. It is on this account that he asks God to confer His benign light right now.

Who are these long line of devotees who have come down the ages in unbroken succession?

They are:

Thiruvalluvar, Ist century A.C.
Mannikkavaachakar, 3rd century A.C.
Thirumoolar, 5th century A.C.
Thirugnanasambandhar, 7th century A.C.
Thirunaavukkarasar, 7th century A.C.
Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal, 9th century A.C.
The Aalwaars, 5th century to 10th century A.C.

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Pattinatthaar, 10th century A.C.
Arunagirinaathar, 12th century A.C.
Meikandaar, 14th century A.C.
Thaayumaanavar 18th century A.C.

Are these the only ones who form the long line of the galaxy of saints who have come down the ages unbroken succession? Certainly not.

There have been many many who have apprehended the Reality, but only a few have left accounts thereof. It is these whom we have listed above.

Raamalinga Swaamikal also claims that he was a devotee in past births as well. He sings:

Oh primal and unique Being
Who bestow Your grace
from the proscenium in Thillai!
Oh Field in which virtue grows!
Oh flawless Gem
abiding in sacred Thirumullaivaayil girt by groves
which grow in a slush of honey!
I am not a new-comer;
note that I am one
who, from ancient times,
have cherished love to Your blossomy feet.
Is it the nature of Your holy grace
to refrain from asking:
"With what idea have you come here?"

661.II.9 aruliyal Vinaaval 9

Raamalinga Swaamikal reverts to this theme on several other occasions.

Addressing Lord Thiyaagesan of Thiruvotriyoor he says:

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Though you may say that
I am not your devotee,
I have remained your devotee
in the past and in the present too.
Oh Sire!
Other than that it is your duty
to put up with all the misdeeds
of this hard-hearted fellow,
I have not known the contrary,
Oh my virtuous primeval Being
with the (sacred ash) dust-laden body!
Oh Lord of the pure ones
with the lovely matted locks!
Oh divine Light
Whom the mean fellows could not search out!
Oh Thiyaagamani who abide in Otriyoor!

1026. II. 40 avalatthul alunkal 10

Raamalinga Swaamikal did not merely lay claim to belong to the long unbroken line of devotees of the Lord, but he testifies to this by paying profuse homage to the four Camaya Kuravars - the Fathers of the Faith -Thirugnaanasambandhar, Thirunaavukkarasar, Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal, and Maanikkavaachakar, in scores of songs.

The 11th and concluding stanza of this decad shows us the very high esteem which Raamalinga Swaamikal had for Thirugnaanasambandhar. He sings:

Oh lamp that shines forth
from the divine clan of Kauneeyars
hailing from far-famed Senpai!
Oh honey that tastes sweet
in my mind without causing satiety!

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Oh wish-granting tree
growing from the grace of the gaze
of the Coral Mountain
with a throat of dense darkness!
Oh sugar-cane, Oh fruit,
Oh my two eyes,
Oh dark pupil of my eye,
Oh tender shoot of childish prattle
which had, at the comely age of three,
the fortune of being fed
with milk drawn from Umaa's sweet breast!
Oh unique succour to my dear life!
Oh Lord Sambandhaa of great gnosis!
Those who speak of your scared fame
Will revel in great wealth
more and more.

3236. V. 9 aaludaiya pillayaar arulmaalai 11

To Thirunaavukkarasar, our saint pays homage in these terms:

Oh virtuous one,
who, by the strength of the glory of the grace
of the tongue of a Flame that is Civan
which reigns supreme in the holy place Atikai
Famed for its sacredness,
becoming a true embodiment
of the experience of Reality,
received the name of King of the Gift of Speech
that the light of the Faith of Civan
may flourish,
and who fittingly shouldered the hoe!
Oh wisdom of all the arts
indwelling my thoughts!
Oh merciful sea gnosis!
Do will that I contemplate your feet!

3237. V. 10 aaludaiya arasukal arunmaalai 1

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In the tenth verse of the same decad our saint calls Thirunaavukkarasar his guru, his father, his family deity. He sings:

Oh luscious honey that seeps forth
from the enlightened mind with exceeding sweetness!
Oh deity who are the king of words!
Oh magnanimous one who bestowed bliss
On Appoothi, illustrious for his adherence to truth!
Oh my father!
Oh fullness of wisdom filling up my mind!
Oh my guru!
Oh our family deity!
Oh flame of the Faith of Civan!
Oh guide in the great path devoid of suffering!
Oh peerless treasure!
Oh you who are famed as 'appan'!

3246. V. 10 aaludaiya arasukal arunmaalai 10

In one of the ten stanzas in homage to Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal, we find a plea addressed to him which was evidently answered, for an experience similar to the one which Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal was vouchsafed to Raamalinga Swaamikal also. That song is this:

Oh devotee famed for his contentiousness!
Do graciously tell me
what is the great penance you performed
that our great Lord's feet
not a whit of which
can be experienced by the Vedas and all the arts
though they chant their praises endless times
with rising crescendo -
brushed the crown of your head
dedicated to a sacred cause.

3250. V. 11 aaludaiya nampikal arunmaalai 4

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From the seventh verse of the same decad we learn that Raamalinga Swaamikal not only paid homage through his poems to the four Camaya Kuravars but also read their songs daily as a routine item of his spiritual exercises. Thus sings our saint in evidence of this:

When I read every day your sacred songs
which are honey-exuding ambrosia,
I am not aware of my self.
Is it my tongue only which reads the poems?
My flesh reads, my heart reads,
my life reads, and even the life of my life reads;
note that this is my experience,
Oh magnanimous one of unique mercy!

3253. V. II aaludaiya nampikal arunmaalai 7

It is to be noted that four decads dedicated to the four Camaya Kuravars appear as the concluding decads of the 5th Book of the Arutpaa. This Book was sung when our saint was residing at Karunkuzhi, between 1858 and 1867. We may not be far wrong if we place the date at about 1860. The twelve decads of this Book could not have taken him more than a few days to sing. To put it in another way, this Book was sung just prior to his singing the songs of the 6th Book, the Book in which the final experiences, the mature conclusions and beliefs, the acme of his spiritual life are given expression to. Ooran Atikal, the ablest biographer of the Swaamikal and the most learned editor of his Arutpaa says that the Swaamikal's manuscripts show that the decads of the 5th Book were written

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in the same order as they are now published in his edition. We may therefore conclude that these four decads dedicated by Raamalinga Swaamikal to Thirugnaanasambandhar, Thirunaavukkarasar, Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal and Maanikkavaachakar were in a sense prayers to his spiritual gurus before he flew into the soaring heights of the spiritual space-world seeking union with the Godhead in the spaceless beyond.

After reading the above poems of homage to the four Camaya Kuravars no one will be left in any doubt about the indebtedness of our Swaamikal to all those have gone before him in the genealogical tree of spiritual guides of Tamilnaadu or about his legitimate place in that genealogical tree.

Raamalinga Swaamikal could never bear to see anyone suffer from hunger. This compassion was, in all probability, the outcome of the divine compassion shown unto him by Lord Civan Himself Who came once as our saint's brother's wife, once as the priest of a temple, once as the divine Mother Herself, and fed him when he was sore distressed by hunger. Our saint relates these incidents with awe and gratitude. He sings:

Oh Mother mine sweet to my soul
Who, when I was lying weary with hunger on a pial,
came with a shining basin
containing delicious food
in one of Your sacred hands
and woke me up, asking:

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"Did you go to Otri and suffer hunger?"
and graciously served me the food with pleasure!
Oh Mother of noble characteristics Who bore me
and Who solicitously transformed
all the attachments which beset me
into attachment to Your feet!
Oh King Who dance a great dance
in the Hall of Gems
with persons of noble qualities
standing around praising You!
Do be pleased to accept my blabberings too.

4132. VI. 57 arul vilakka maalai 43

Oh my virtuous goodly Succourer
Who, when I was lying one dark night
on a nook and corner pial
hungry and tired,
came looking for me
and offering me food
made me eat,
and rid me of my hunger!
Oh unique Gem
Who, ridding me of the darkness of delusion
and bestowing on me
all the blessings of life,
made me be seated
on the platform decked with gems!

4137. VI. 57 arul vilakka maalai 48

Oh Light
Who, bringing me up by giving me good food
whenever I was hungry
as if You Yourself were hungry,
bestowed on me here
the clear ambrosia of enlightenment in such a way
that I never felt the weariness
caused by the carnal hunger!

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Oh King of all the souls
Who bestowed on me the boon
that I may have all to myself
a life rare to Indra, the King of the heavens,
to tall Lord Vishnu
and to Brahma of four faces!
Oh Fragrance of flowers laden with honey!
Oh King Who perform the dance of gnosis
in the sacred hall in Thillai!
Do graciously accept my poor words.

4138. VI. 57 arul vilakka maalai 49

To this son of God, God was not only a solicitous mother but a stern father too. On one occasion, due to acute hunger our saint had taken his meals before he had been to the temple and had rendered his homage to the Giver of food even to the toad inside rocks. God punished our saint peremptorily. We are not told what the punishment was, but it must have been quite severe, for our saint devotes ten stanzas to this act of wrathful grace on the part of God. I will content myself with producing one of them here. He sings:

Oh Gem of a ruby
Who bestow grace on those free of ill-repute!
Oh munificent One!
I, a sinner with a mind
that is similar to a granite slab
devoid of any moisture,
a fellow with a heart
which is treachery incarnate,
forgetting to worship You,
had taken my meals
even like the evil dog
which runs about eating

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the unappetising filth.
That very day,
I was punished in Otri
till I trembled in every fibre of my body.

1047.II.43 pirasaatha vinnappam I

These were not the only acts of unparalleled grace. The greatest was yet to come.

The greatest boon that a devotee of Civan can ever gain is to receive the imprint of Civan's feet on his head. Saint Thirunaavukkarasar begs for this boon in these words:

Before Chieftain Yama valiant in killing
hastens to destroy me,
please engrave on me the print
of Your blossom-like feet;
if You neglect to do this,
note that imperishable slur
will result,
Oh Lord with the hand
on which a fire roars,
Oh Civa, the tendrill like flame,
Who abide in Thiruchchattimutram!

His prayer was heard. He was asked to come to Nalloor. There, he received the imprint of Civan's feet on his head. Relating this incident, he sings:

He made evil Karmas
depart without leaving a trace,
He made a blanket of the hide
of the elephant demented with anger,
He placed on my head
those holy feet
those special kind of flowers

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which with opened petals
were spurting honey
on account of the pressure
of the dense cluster of gem-set crowns
of the heavenly clan
which had come seeking them;
A goodly act is this indeed!

Our Swaamikal refers to this act of unique grace conferred on Thirunaavukkarasar in one of his songs:

Oh King with the rosy hand
bearing the hour-glass shaped drum!
Whenever I think of how our Appar's head felt cool
and experienced bliss
when You placed Your pure flowery golden feet on it
at Nalloor,
not only this sinner's wretched head
where delusion has taken residence
but the mind too feels cool.

2321. III. 6 tiru arul muraiyeedu 151

Maanikkavaachakar also was vouchsafed this boon. He acknowledges this in these words:

I can tell of that occasion
When he abode in state in Idaimaruthu
and planted thereat
His divine feet on my head....

Tiruvaachakam, 2 keerthitthiru akaval, lines 75, 76

He refers again to this incident in a confirmatory manner in the 4th decad in these words:

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Obeisance to You, Oh Knight,
Who made a somebody of even me
and placed Your great feet on my head!

Thiruvaachakam, decad 4, lines 129, 130.

On Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal too, this unique grace was bestowed. Sekkizhar, the hagio grapher of the 12th century thus relates this unforgettable incident in the life of Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal:

At about the hour
when the sun with the sky-traversing lofty chariot
drawn by the green steed
was about to sink into the western sea
he (Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal)
came to the outskirts of Tiruvathikai.
Saying: "I fear to tread with my feet
and enter this great city
where God-owned(Tirunavukk-) arasu,
the saint praised by the world
the bearer of the tool, the hoe
loved to perform with his hands
service to the Lord on the bull",
he entered the Citthavatamatam
situated beyond the cool fields
fed by the sluices.

Sekkizhaar's Thirutthondapuraanam 228.

Even as in the case of these three Camaya - Kuravars, the favour of favours was conferred on Raamalinga Swaamikal also. One day Lord Civan came in the guise of a devotee of Civan to the dharmasaalai (free feeding house) established at Vadaloor by our saint on the 23rd of May 1867 in his 44th year. He stayed with our saint. At night, on

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going to sleep, he lay down in such a way that both his feet touched the head of our saint. Our saint, feeling the feet touching his head, pushed them away. Immediately, God showed His true form and, saying, "Can I, Who came to see you, not have this much liberty?", graciously enslaved him. Our saint relates this incident in the following song:

Oh my Guru who enslaved me saying:
"We have come to know
all the good deeds you have planned to do;
We came to see you in person",
and lay down with intent to graciously establish
Your flowery feet on my head,
and Who, when I haughtily caught hold of the feet
and placed them elsewhere,
laughed and asked:
"What did you think, Oh my son,
have I not this much right?"

4140. VI. 56 arul vilakka maalai 51

Such was the child which was born a hundred and fifty years ago on the 5th of October 1823, a child whose birth was foretold to the mother by no less a person than Civan, a child which had gained Civanhood - immediate apprehension of Civan - even while it was in the womb, a child which felt that it had been sent into the world with a very specific mission to perform, a child which claimed to belong to the genealogical tree of the long unbroken line of saints in Tamilnaadu, a child which paid profuse homage to those saints, acknowledging thereby its indebtedeness to them, a child which claimed to be the son of God and which challenged God to deny

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that He was its legitimate Father, a child which claimed that it was the devotee of Civan in birth after birth in the past, a child which was most solicitously looked after by God Himself, being fed by Him when it was hungry, and being punished when it did wrong, a child which claimed that it will never more be reborn on this earth, a child on whose head Lord Civan placed His holy feet and enslaved him.

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2. BIO-DATA

The father of this unique child, having consigned it to the care of the Father of all beings, apparently thought that it needed his care no longer. He, therefore passed away when the child was six months old, just one month after handing it over to the guardianship of the heavenly Father.

Our child's mother immediately shifted her family to Cinnakkavanam, the village of her birth, near Ponneri town in the Chingleput District of Tamilnadu. She did not stay there very long. In a year or two she migrated with her family to Madras and set up her household in a house, the address of which is given by our Swaamikal himself as a superscription to a letter which he wrote later in his life from Vadaloor to Irukkam Irathinam Muthaliyaar, whose family lived in one portion of the house while the Swaamikal's family lived in another portion during all the thirty-two or so years (till 1858) the Swaamikal lived at Madras. In all probability the family continued to live even after the Swaamikal's departure from Madras in 1858. Irukkam Irathinam Muthaliyaar must have been a child of about the same age as the Swaamikal. The Muthaliyaar, from being a neighbour and a playmate, became a close acquaintance, an admirer, a friend, a disciple, and ultimately a publisher of the Swaamikal. The address of the house is 38, Elukinaru Veeraasaamy Pillai Street, Pethunaayakkanpettai. From some other letter of

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the Swaamikal, we learn that the house was situated on the eastern side of the street which shows that the street ran north-south-and was opposite the house of one Supparaaya Pillai who served in the District Collector's Office. Our Swaamikal was very meticulous whatever he thought, did, spoke or wrote.

Raamalingam was the last of five children to his parents. He had Sabhaapathi and Parasuraaman for brothers and Unnaamulai and Sundaram for sisters. Cinnammai put her eldest son, Sabhaapathi to study under Kaanchipuram Mahaavidwan Sabhaapathi Muthaliyaar, and soon Sabhaapathi (the eldest son) was earning his livelihood by giving religious discourses on the puraanas. Raamalingam was brought up under the guardianship of his elder brother. We do not know the difference in age between the two of them, but we may presume that it must have been at least fifteen to twenty years.

Our saint, though he stayed in Madras from his infancy to his thirty-fifth year, from about 1826 to 1858, yet he never got to like Madras. He grew more and more unhappy and wished to go away from Madras to a small village. He makes reference to this desire in songs written in his later life at Vadaloor. He sings:

Fearing that if looked on
the extrovert life of this world
my mind would be disturbed,
I spent every day, all the day-light hours,

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seeking (solitude in) the gardens
on the outskirts of the city
and wandering in other places,
Not only in the daytime but at night as well
I wandered in many places,
What need for this slave to say all this?
This is nothing but what is known to You.

3457. VI. 13 pillai-p-peru vinnappam 48

But Thiruvotriyoor, where he was in the habit of going almost every day to worship Civan, going by the name of Thiyaagesan in that shrine, had a great fascination for him, and for sometime he could not choose between Thiruvotriyoor and Thillai. He relates this dilemma.

That the woes of life may depart from me,
I do not know whether I should stay near Otri
or wend my way to Thillai:
Oh Civan, what shall I do?
I am a mean fellow of little grace,
If you fail to bestow Your grace quickly,
saying: "Come hither",
how can I gain You?
Oh beautiful transcendent One of Otri
Whom the vile cannot approach!
Oh You Who stand in the Common Hall (in Thillai)
for the sake of all those who pay obeisance to You!

1083. II. 16 cirumai vinnappam 7

Ultimately Thillai won.

Before we follow the Swaamikal to Thillai, we may record an incident in his life in Madras, an important incident in the ordinary world's estimation, but a very trifling one as far as the

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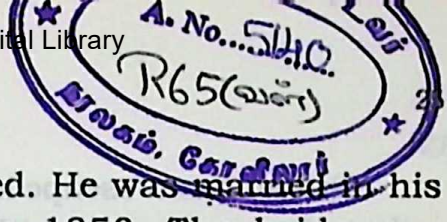

Swaamikal was concerned. He was married in his twenty-seventh year, in 1850. The bride was Dhanammaal, daughter of the Swaamikal's eldest sister, Unnaamulai-ammaal. In 1850, twenty-seven was quite an advanced age for a young man in Tamilnadu - for that matter, anywhere in India - to be married. From this we can infer that our Swaamikal must have strongly and for long resisted the efforts of his family to get him married. In one of his songs he sings of his aversion to sexual life. He addresses Lord Nataraajaa in these words:

If you would still consign me
to the embraces of women,
that is your will's fulfilment:
it is not the least acceptable to me:
what can I do about this?
As I have a disgust towards this
from even my suckling days,
Oh you who dance in the eternal hall in Thillai,
all my esteem is only to Your sacred feet blossom.

3392. VI. 12 pillai-ch-chiru vinnappam 7

Aversion he had, of course, for marriage and all that it stands for. To the young man of the world, marriage is the door to the life of the householder, to that walk of life held up to all mankind by Thiruvalluvar as a very noble mode of life, as a type of life that will place the man who leads that life as it ought to be led among the gods who live in heaven. But to one who seeks not the transient pleasures of the world but seeks the kingdom of heaven it is a life to be shunned.

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But who can escape karma - praarabdha karma - that share of karma with which a human being is born in this world and which shall have to be worked off. Moreover, "God's will hath no why". So Raamalinga Swaamikal was wedded to his sister's daughter. Wedded he was to her, but bound to her he was not. Praarabdha karma, in his case, took him to the threshold of the cavernous hell called worldly life of wife and children, kith and kin, wealth and penury, pleasures and misery, aagamya karma and rebirth, but allowed him to retreat and escape for ever therefrom. He went into the nuptial chamber with a talisman in his hand, a talisman which guarded him from the beauty of his bride, from the inviting charms of her body, from the heady perfume of flowers, from the silken bed, from the heavy narcotic called sexual life. The talisman was a copy of the book he worshipped - the Thiruvaachakam. He went in a brahmachaari, a celibate, and came out next morning a celibate still. Of this he sings:

Whether it is vengeful cruel karma
or an act of Your grace,
I do not know,
While I was free of any infatuation
over any one of several damsels of sorts.
I, still, felt inclined to touch the hand of one them,
But, apart from touching her
who had bent down (to touch my feet)
I did not enter her,
But thinking of this even now,
I go cold and clammy (with shame)

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Whenever I think of it,
my heart breaks.
What more is there to say,
Oh my father?
You know.

3452. VI. 13.pillai-p-peru vinnappam 43

The Swaamikal came out unscathed by this ordeal by night and Dhanammaal passes out of our story for ever. Her mother, Swaamikal's eldest sister, Unnaamulai-ammaal, seems to have maintained good relations with him, for we find her visiting him at Vadaloor. The Swaamikal writes thus on 20-3-186 in a letter to Irukkam Iratthinam Muthaliyaar: "It is a month since I sent (manuscripts of certain decads) through my eldest sister who had been here and was returning there."

The Swaamikal moved to Thillai - present Chidambaram - in 1858, but did not live there. It is said that one Venkata Reddiyaar, the village revenue accountant of Karunkuzhi, a village about 30 kilometres from Thillai, met him at Thillai and invited him to stay with him at Karunkuzhi. He assigned to our Swaamikal a room in his house which even today is in the occupancy of the descendants of Venkata Reddiyaar. The house is even now in a state of good repair. It has a plinth area of about 235.16 square metres. The Swaamikal's room is about 9.25 square metres area.

Our Swaamikal was a great walker. In Madras, he walked to Thiruvotriyoor and back, a distance of

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over 16 to 20 kilometres in all, almost every day, commencing, perhaps, from his twelfth year to the date he left Madras for good, that is for 23 years. Similarly, he was in the habit of walking from Karunkuzhi to Thillai and back through a shortcut route across the fields and groves.

In 1867, he moved to Vadaloor after a stay of nine years in Karunkuzhi. It is evident from his biography that he made this move in order to supervise the building of the Dharmasaalai and the Gnaanasabai and to direct their daily activities. The Dharmasaalai is a charitable inn which has fed from its inception in 1867 to this date, for over a century, millions of pilgrims, saadhus, the destitute, and the hungry. Vadaloor is the centre where four highways meet and through which people move from north to south, south to north, east to west and west to east, all through the year. The charitable inn had and has no endowments of land or money. It is run on the generosity of the people - of the poor people - and this generosity has not shrunk or dried up to this day.

Vallalaar, however, had to flee Vadaloor as the avaricious and the sick and the dead made his life at Vadaloor unbearable. Rumours had gone round that he can turn lead into gold and give life to the dead. He fled to Mettukkuppam, a village four and three quarters of a Kilometre to the south of Vadaloor, and took refuge in a rest house which had been built by the villagers for their Vaishnava

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gurus to stay in when they came from Srirangam annually to bless their flock and to initiate new members into the faith. But very long before our Swaamikal's time, they had ceased to come on tour and, therefore, the rest house, called 'Tirumaalikai' (sacred mansion) in Vaishnava parlance, was available for our Swaamikal's use. Today, it goes by the name of Ciddhivilaaka-tiru-maalikai. This name was given by the Swaamikal. Here he stayed till the 30th of January 1874, a period of about four years. On that historic day, he locked himself for the night in his room and vanished for ever from the ken of man. Since then, a part of the room is screened off by a wooden screen behind which no one has stepped in to this day. Once a year the doors of the room are opened by a priest and closed behind him. He then opens a very wide window in the side wall in front of which pass thousands of devotees peering into the dark interior and seeing nothing but the exterior of the wooden screen which keeps to itself the secret of the august chamber.

Born on 5th October 1823, in a life of fifty years, three months, and twenty-six days, the Swaamikal had sung the Six Books of the Thiru Arutpaa comprising 5818 stanzas, divided into 379 decads, a few of them running into hundreds of lines, and a few more thousands of lines of odd poems and prose writings, some them being letters to certain persons. Of the Periya Puraanam it is usual to say: "Pillai paathi, puraanam paathi", that is the biography of

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saint Thirugnaanasambandhar takes up half of the book and that other puraanams (hagiographies) take up the other half of the book. We can similarly say of the Thiru Arutpaa that the Sixth Book occupies half of the work and the first five the other half. For the first five books comprise 235 decads and 3266 stanzas while the sixth comprises 144 decads and 2552 stanzas. Of these six Books, the last six decads of the third Book, a total of 53 stanzas, all of them having Ganapati as the theme, can be presumed to having been sung at Karunkuzhi. As regards the Fourth Book, 21 decads out of 41 decads have definite internal evidence to show that they have Nataraajaa in Thillai as the theme. These may, therefore, be taken to have been sung in Karunkuzhi. The rest too may, by inference, be presumed to have been sung in Karunkuzhi. The Fifth and the Sixth Books are incontrovertibly products of the period of the stay in Karunkuzhi, Vadaloor, and Mettukkuppam as well if we can presume that any poem was sung during the period of the four years' stay in Mettukkuppam. It seems more reasonable to presume that his days of authorship of poems ended with his stay in Vadaloor. His mind had completely turned inward and his heart had taken the place of his mouth and was singing a song of songs, a song of beautitude for having apprehended the Real. Some scholars, however, think that the last decad of the Sixth Book, the Anubhava Maalai, was sung at Mettukkuppam. They may be right.

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In short, the number of decads and stanzas sung in the pre-Karunkuzhi period, that is in the period of the stay in Madras, in about 26 years, can be reckoned at 176 decads and 2517 stanzas against 203 decads and 3301 stanzas, an output in the next 12 to 13 years only. These figures themselves are a measure of the intensity of the spiritual life of the Swaamikal in the last 16 to 17 years of his sojourn on earth.

Our Swaamikal's life, omitting the short stay of a year or two in Chinnakaavanam, therefore, comprises three periods, namely.

(i) the period of about 32 years' stay in Madras,

(ii) the period of 9 plus 4 years stay in Karunkuzhi and Vadaloor respectively.

(iii) the period of four years in Mettukkuppam.

These can be designated respectively as

(i) the period of the Purgative Way (26 years),

(ii) the period of the Illuminative Way (12 to 13 years)

(iii) the period of the Unitive Way (4 years).

What are these ways? The Purgative Way, as the name implies, is that part of long path which one treads towards the Godhead in which one purges oneself of all desires and attachments, of all imperfections, acts of commission and omission, shortcomings in renunciation and shortcomings in

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the total love of God, in the passion for the apprehension of the Godhead. The Illuminative Way is that part of the path which comes after the Purgative Way and in which one gains illumination, knowledge, gnosis. There is an intellectual aspect and an emotional aspect to this way. There is a strong outpouring of the grace of God on the pilgrim treading this part of the long road to the Godhead. Last is the Unitive Way, that part of the pathway in which the pilgrim marches on with buoyant and joyous steps, filled with the hope freed from doubt or misconception. The journey is characterized by a sense of urgency. The pilgrim in this part of his journey begins to walk fast, then breaks into a loping trot, and finally gallops on with increasing tempo towards the beckoning smile, the outstretched arms, and is soon locked in an eternal embrace with the Eternal Being, the Godhead, the Ground of all being.

Such are the three ways which correspond to the three major periods of the Swaamikal's life on this earth. These three ways are hinted at in the Upanishadic text which has been most happily rendered into English by Dr. Annie Besant thus:

From the unreal lead me to the real:
from darkness lead me to Light:
from death lead me to immortality.

Maanikkavaachakar transposing this aspiration and prayer into a joyous achievement renders the Upanishadic text thus:

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"Oh Flame of the Real
Who, coming, in your Grace,
that all unreality in me may dispelled be,
scintillate in me as the gnosis of the real!
Oh blissful noble lord,
Oh pre-eminent Wisdom
Who dispel the ignorance of me
who have no knowledge of any kind whatsoever!
Oh You who are not created,
and have no life-span or end,
who create, sustain, destroy and bestow grace,
do rid me (of this cycle of births)
and induct me into the fold of Your devotees!

Thiruvaachakam, I. Civapuraanam lines 37 to 43

We shall in other chapters follow the footsteps of the Swaamikal as he makes his way to the God-head through these three sections of the pathway, the first of which is painful and dolorous, the second a strange mixture of sorrow and joy, sorrow being replaced by joy as ignorance is slowly replaced by illumination, and the last a section of sheer delight, of mounting bliss.

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3. ECCE HOMO

(BEHOLD THE MAN)

Photography had come to India in the life-time of our Swaamikal, but no photograph of him is available to us. It is said that attempts to photograph him always ended in failure. Nor do we have any portrait of the Swaamikal. What we have today and what appears now in books and periodicals is a modern artist's impression of the Swaamikal, a product of the imagination based on certain accounts of the appearance of the Swaamikal and on certain of his poems.

Fortunately, we have on record a vivid description of the Swaamikal by one of his contemporaries, Sri Velaayutha Muthaliyaar of Tholuvoor, a disciple of the Swaamikal. Velaayutha Muthaliyaar was born in 1832, and died on 22nd February 1889, fifteen years after the Swaamikal's antardhaan' - vanishing from sight of man. By his own admission (in a letter addressed to the author of "Hints on Esoteric Theosophy") he was a disciple of the Swaamikal. He says; "In 1849 I became his disciple". That is to say, he became the Swaamikal's disciple in his 17th year and in the 26th year of the Swaamikal. This discipleship continued till 1874, for a period of exactly a quarter of a century, till the Swaamikal's antardhaan. The Muthaliyaar says:

> "In personal appearance, Raamalingam was a moderatley tall, spare man - so spare, indeed,

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as to virtually appear a skeleton - yet withal a strong man, erect in stature, and walking very rapidly: with a face of a clear brown complexion, a straight thin nose, very large fiery eyes, and with a look of constant sorrow on his face. Towards the end, he let his hair grow long: and, what is rather unusual with Yogis, he wore shoes. His habits were extremely abstemious. He was known to hardly ever take any rest. A strict vegetarian, he ate but once in two or three days, and was then satisfied with a few mouthfuls of rice. But when fasting for a period of two or three months, at a time, he literally ate nothing living merely on warm water with a little sugar dissolved in it".

We have the Swaamikal's own songs to corroborate the Muthaliyaar. He sings:

Knowing the tenderness of my fervid heart
and the frailty of this poor fellow's body,
if, yet, you would not take pity on me.
Oh our only One with the celestial Ganga.
the crescent moon, and the luxurious matted locks,
who else will show pity to me?

Even after noticing
the sensitiveness of my mind
and the frailty of my body
which feel embarrassed at the hands
of the base ones of furtive minds,
if You would not show me grace
by taking pity on me
even to a trifling extent,

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who will take pity on me
in this jeering world?

2631,2632. VI. 7 thiruppukazh pathikam 1,2

The Muthaliyaar speaks of the Swaamikal as "a moderately tall, spare man - so spare, indeed, as to virtually appear a skeleton". Moreover, according to him, the Swaamikal was "of a clear brown complexion". The Muthaliyaar, however, seems to have failed to notice another aspect of his body, or, at least, has failed to mention it, if he had noticed it. The latter is, perhaps, the case.

Mannikkavaachakar sings of two bodies in lines 115 to 120 of the Thiru-anda-p-pakuti, the decad of the Thiruvaachakam, to which our Swaamikal was very attached as will be seen from his song (stanza 4 of decad 12 of Book V, continuous serial number 3260). Those lines are:

The Superb One
Who, like the fragrance of flowers,
rising high and filling everywhere without omission,
pervades everything.
that effulgent Being
who, for my sake coming today,
without any effort on my part,
did away with the body which spells ruin:
He came today without any effort on my part,
and abode in me;
obeisance to Him;
He made for me a body which yields ecstasy;
obeisance to Him.

The body which yields ecstasy that Velaayutha Muthaliyaar has failed to mention in his letter to

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the author of "Hints on Esoteric Theosophy". Perhaps he did not know about this unique body, or, more probably, he felt that it would not be proper to mention such an esoteric matter in a letter to a stranger. We have to go to our Swaamikal's songs for information about this unique body. He has sung many songs in which he refers to this body. He sings:

To the amazement of everyone,
You raised me high up,
me who have no peer in vileness;
GOLDEN FORM, unsullied mind,
perfect gnosis, overfull wealth,
and spiritual powers
that can achieve everything one thinks of,
great bliss,
all these to myself You bestowed on me.
Oh supreme Chief with no peer to You,
what shall I say of Your benevolence!

3849. VI.36 petra petrinai viyatthal 8

Oh grand Life
resplendent in the dazzling Hall of Gnosis!
Oh God Who mainfest Yourself
in the midst of a tongue of flame
which discloses (You to me)!
Oh You Who graciously let Your ears be filled
with a plea which I presented
that this body which I don now, all of it,
may turn into imperishable golden form!

3859.. VI.37 azhivuraa arul vativa-p-peru 8

I wish I had space to reproduce all the sixteen stanzas of the 101st decad of Book VI. The name of the decad is "The Blessing of the Golden Form". Our saint relates in this decad spiritual experiences of a

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very high order not given to many to have, and given to fewer still to record. I had almost said that these stanzas should have found a place in the very last decad of Book VI, called 'anupava maalai' i.e., the 'Garland of Experience'. But the experience (I deliberately do not use the plural) related in that decad belongs to the category of experience spoken of by Thomas Merton, the greatest mystic of this century, in the paragraph quoted below from his book "Seeds of Contemplation" He writes:

> "What happens is that the separate entity that is you apparently disappears and nothing seems to be left but a pure freedom indistinguishable, from infinite Freedom, love identified with love. Not two loves, one waiting for the other, striving for the other, but Love loving in Freedom.
>
> "Would you call this experience? I think you might say that this only becomes an experience in a man's memory. Otherwise it seems wrong to even speak of it as something that happens. Because things that happen have to happen to some subject, and experiences have to be experienced by someone. But here the subject of any divided or limited creature experience seems to have vanished. You are not you, you are fruition. If you like, you do not have an experience, you become Experience: but that is entirely different, because you no longer exist in such a way that

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you can reflect on yourself or see yourself having an experience, or judge what is going on that is not eternal and unchanging and an activity so tremendous that it is infinitely still".

The experiences described in the decad which have been quoted are of a different order and, in a way, are preludes to the ultimate experience when one cannot be said to have an experience but becomes Experience itself. That is, probably, the reason why the Swaamikal did not include this experience of gaining the golden body in the 'anubava maalai'.

The next stanza which I wish to quote is one of exultation. It runs:

Blow, Oh conch, blow
that he redeemed my soul,
Blow, Oh conch blow
that bliss resulted,
Blow, Oh conch, blow
that He gave me a golden form:
Blow, Oh conch blow,
"Hail Father of the Golden Hail!

5273. VI. 122 oothu oothu sange 5

The above poem lets us into the secret of when the shrunken and flabby-skinned body becomes a body of golden hue. This happens, as the Swaamikal tells us, when one has realised God. This is confirmed by another song of the Swaamikal with which we will close this matter of the transformation of the body subject to decay into a body of golden hue. Our Swaamikal sings thus in the last decad of his Arutpaa:

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Whenever I was hungry
giving me good pure food,
as if He Himself were hungry,
and, ridding me of the harassing hunger,
He graciously established both his feet
in my heart replete with flesh,
and gave me sanctuary,
At the moment when my Bridegroom
Who dances in the Hall of Gnosis,
and Who is rare for even the king of the heavens
to gain -
embraced me externally,
I hugged the golden form
which He pressed on me
and rejoiced.
As regards the esoteric embrace,
is it possible to tell you of its sublimity?

5807. VI. 142 anubhava maalai 94

When Thirugnaanasambandhar merged with his bride and the members of the marriage party in the Effulgence that is Civan in Nalloor, when Maanikkavaachkar merged in the Mystery of mysteries in Thillai, when Sundarmoorthi Swaamikal ascended to heaven on the white elephant, when Thirunaavukkarasar merged in Civan in Thiruppukaloor - the Sanctuary town - with these words; "Oh virtuous One, verily, I am coming to Your feet" and, if I may take the liberty of saying so, when Jesus Christ ascended to heaven after rising from the grave, all of them had gained this golden body and it was with it that they merged in the effulgence that is the Godhead. So too did our Raamalinga Swaamikal when he shut himself up

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on the 30th of January 1874 in his room in the Siddhivilaaka-t-thiru-maalikai and vanished from the ken of mankind.

In the matter of clothing our Swaamikal was quite austere. "His garments consisted but of two pieces of white cloth", says Velaayutha Muthaliyaar. Ascetics in Tamilnadu did not take to the ochre cloth, but wore the same white cloth which the householder also wore. In fact, in some of his poems, Thirugnaanasambandhar sneers at the ochre cloth fancied by Jain monks. There was a difference, however, in the way the cloth was worn, while, perhaps, the householder wore it trailing down to his ankles, the ascetic wore it like a midi garment, the edge of the cloth not reaching below the middle of the calf-muscles of the legs. This garment was called 'kanthai' and even Civan is sung as wearing this 'kanthai'! Today 'kanthai' means, in Tamil, a cloth in tatters but that is not the case with the garment of the ascetic. The Swaamikal himself describes his dress and deportment. He sings:

Shy of walking with arms aswinging,
I walked about
with my arms crossed on my chest;
hating to show my bare body,
behold, I hid my body entirely
with white cloth:
Oh my Sire, I never noticed carefully
the garb, gait, and colour
of others in this world,
and if (by chance) I happened to see them
I was greatly seized by fear.

3461.VI.13 pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 52

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The crossing of the arms on the chest is an external sign of an internal atakkam udaimai, a self-control, a control of the five senses. The crossing of the arms may, therefore, be called a mudra, a gesture or pose, similar to the poses of the hands and fingers assumed by dancers of the Bharatha Naatyam to express a sentiment. The Swaamikal was modesty incarnate. He did not like the limelight before which he was exposed to the world. Referring to this, he sings:

Even though those who had ripened
(in spiritual life)
in that manner
did not know the least
(about the Godhead),
I had thought to remain unknown to anyone
after having had a vision
of the unique Form
ripened (in my mind) in the perfect manner:
I do not know whether
it was God's natural act of grace
or act of the great maayai
of that noted colour (darkness)
that I,
who had decided to remain incognito in this manner,
was dragged into the street
for all to know me.
Oh dancing King of the proscenium,
behold, my mind is pacing the hall
(in great perturbation).

3710. VI. 24 tharbodha izhappu 1

He disliked costly clothing and objected to even an umbrella being held over his head by solicitous friends. He sings:

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When my friends clothed me
in specially chosen gold-lace-bordered cloth,
all those who witnessed the dismay I felt
were dismayed in turn (for my sake);
and whenever, in the hot sun,
they held over me an umbrella,
surprised (at my going about without it),
I felt disconcerted in my mind;
fearing to walk in the muddy street
swinging one end of the loin cloth
held in my hand,
Oh my Father,
I pulled up the lower hem of my cloth
and tied it round my waist.

3460. VI. 13 pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 51

Similarly, our Swaamikal hesitated to sit on a high seat, or to sit with a leg thrown over the other, or to do many other similar acts of arrogance which we commit several times a day without giving the least thought to the fact they are outward signs of an inward hauteur.

The Muthaliyaar says that our Swaamikal wore shoes contrary to the habit of ascetics. But from a song of our Swaamikal we learn that often he went about bare-footed. Describing an incident, which probably caused him great amusement he sings:

Shoes there are none,
no white shirt is on the body,
no decent cloth there is,
personality there is none,
no money is in the hand,
the body has no body,
no house, no hauteur,

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there is no bent of mind for marriage,
Oh mind of mine,
what path have you taken?

847.VI.26 nenjodu kilatthal 3

It is said that this song was sung with reference to an invitation to a wedding in Madras at Sabhaapathi Muthaliyaar's house. Perhaps, the Swaamikal was rebuffed at the doors of the marriage hall.

Our Swaamikal held the sacred ash in the highest regard and we need have no doubts that he wore the ash for the best part of his life, if not throughout his life. He has sung as many as five decads, 51 stanzas, specifically devoted to the sacred ash. These are the 14th, 30th and 45th decads of Books I and the 25th and 38th decads of Book II, called *'aarezhutthu unmai' ;'punniyaneetru maanmiyam' 'sevi arivurutthal', `punniya vilakkam', and 'siva punniya-t-thetram'* respectively. I am not unaware that these songs were sung in his early years, in the years when he was a devotee of Murukan at Kandhakottam and lord Thiyaagesan at Otriyoor. These facts need not deter us from using these stanzas to gain a mental picture of the Swaamikal in absence of a photograph or a portrait.

In the 14th decad he pays praise, obeisance, to two things, the *aarezhutthu* or *shadaakshara* or the Six (mantric/tantric) Letters, namely, Sa-Ra-Va-Na-Bha-Va, and the sacred ash. Even as Na-Ma-Ci-Vaa-Ya is the Five Mantric letters to invoke Civan,

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so is Saravanabhava, the Six Mantric letters, to invoke Murukan. Our Swaamikal sings:

Oh Treasure of greatness,
Oh Son begot by great penance
by the great Lord
Who has Vishnu as His bull steed!
If, here on earth,
Your Six Letters are pronounced
with one-pointed mind,
and the supreme sacred white ash is worn,
prosperity here and in the here-after
will accrue,.
while not the least of evil will accrue.

211.1.14 aarezhuthu unmai 1

In the last stanza of the same decad he asserts:

The grace of Him
Who burnt the City of those
who would not think of Him
will accrue to one,
and one will be enabled to approach
the shade of the Feet (of Civan)
which the sacred tall Vishnu could not approach,
if one wears the sacred ash heavily saying:
"Oh Son
Whom the mountain-dwelling Dame
of music-laden speech
has graciously borne!
Oh twelve-eyed One!
Oh our Father!"

364.I.30 punniya neetru maanmiyam 10

It is in the 38th decad of Book Two that the Swaamikal gives very strong expression to his attachment to the sacred ash and those who wear it

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and his aversion to those who do not wear it. He sings:

Oh my eyes!
Avoid seeing even in your dreams
the lowly wretches
who would not wear God's ash:
look upon with love
the devotees who wear the holy ash
which will do away with
the impurities which attack the soul,
that we might approach (and gain) Him
Who, listening to the veena
from which sweet music is evoked,
(and pleased therewith)
bestowed on (Raavana) the Raakshasa
long life along with a sword.

997.II.38 civa punniya-t-thetram 1

While it would be inadvisable for the purposes of this book to reproduce here the remaining nine stanzas of this decad, it is, however, very necessary to give extracts of at least the first two lines of each of them. He sings:

If you happen to meet the base ones
who, saying: 'Obeisance to You, Oh Lord!'.
do not wear the ash,
forsake that place in disgust.

** ** ** **

If you meet the mean ones
who do not wear the divine ash
run away and hide yourself
as if you had met the hissing snake.

** ** ** **

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If the demons
who do not wear pure ash,
were to say something,
deem it to be rubbish,
and shut (your ears tightly)

** ** ** **

Let your dear life tremble
if the bodies of the dogs
who do not wear the goodly ash
happen to stink....

** ** ** **

If those who do not wear the grace-giving ash
serve you ambrosia itself as food,
avoid eating that filth....

** ** ** **

If those who would not wear the ash
which bestows release from the bondage of birth
were to touch you
even with the tips of their fingers,
tremble with resentment
as if thorns were piercing you....

** ** ** **

Forsake giving even as much as
half a sesame seed
to the base curs, the vile ones,
who do not wear the sweet ash.....

** ** ** **

Avoid walking in the hall of a house
where lie the fools who do not wear the ash

** ** ** **

Oh my heart!
Forsake thinking, even by oversight,
of the vile ones
who do not wear the ash
which confers eternity.....

** ** ** **

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It is inconceivable that the Swaamikal, who was so strongly attached to the sacred ash and who, personification of compassion as he was, yet felt so deeply as to say; "Forsake giving even as much as half a sesame seed to the base curs, the vile ones, who do not wear the sweet ash", retracted all these beliefs in his last day. This idea has got about, I believe, through a thoroughly erroneous recording and or interpretation of some of his last days' utterances by the disciples who heard them. He did not recant, he grew out of them, he evolved. We shall deal with this matter in detail far down this book.

The mystic Five Letter mantra-Na-Ma-Ci-Vaa-Ya-in its various forms, was very dear to our Swaamikal. The mantra is called *ainthezhutthu* in Tamil, and *panchaaksharam* in Sanskrit. Even as the Four *Camaya-Kuravars* bad sung on the greatness of the mystic five letters, so has the Swaamikal as well. The Five Letter mantra is of several forms, the most common being Na-Ma-Ci-Vaa-Ya and Ci-Vaa-Ya-Na-Ma, the former being called the gross Five letters and the latter the subtle Five letters. Ci-Va-Ya, a mantra made up of only three of the Five letters is called the Causal Five Letters. The Swaamikal has devoted one decad for each of these three forms of the mantra, the 37th, the 25th and the 21st decads respectively of the Second Book. Ooran Atikal has listed 25 more stanzas scattered through the Arutpaa which have reference to the Five Letters.

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Oh mind of mine!
What profit did not you find
in getting infatuated by the eyes
of women with brows shaped like bent bows,
and suffering at the hands
of those perfidious ones
and yet daily yearning for them?
Go with me to beauteous Otriyoor
and meditate chanting
"Om Civa Shanmuka Civa Om, Om, Ci-Vaa-ya,
Who are sweeter than honey filled sugar-cane
and Who, saturating the minds of your devotees,
are arisen thereon".

794.II.21 arul naama villakkam 1

In the 10th stanza of the 7th decad in Book IV, we find a positive statement to show that the Swaamikal made it a rule to repeat the Five Letters with fervour and faith. He sings:

Though I am a person of unlettered conduct
and lacking in Your mercy,
I do not know of any support
other than the name Namachchivaaya
praised by all good men.
Oh You Who own everything
(in the universe),
If You do not show grace to me,
who (else) will show pity to me?

2640.IV.7 thiruppukazh pathikam 10

As we said earlier, a whole decad of ten stanzas has been devoted by the Swaamikal to the subtle Five Letters, Ci-Vaa-Ya-Na-Ma, as well. We shall quote the first stanza and give extracts only from the rest. Our Swaamikal swears by his own name thus:

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It will bestow a power of speech to sing sweetly,
milk and rice it will give with solicitude,
it will provide an assembly of devotees
sweet to associate with,
good character it will bestow;
Oh heart of mine dear to play with,
fear not,
I wear by my name;
go and wear the ash
saying 'Civaayanama',
and it will bestow on you
a felicity rare to fine.

834.II.25 punniya vilakkam 1

The next ten stanzas catalogue a varied list of benefits which will accrue from pronouncing the subtle Five Letters, Ci-Vaa-Ya-Na-Ma. Says the Swaamikal

Black delusion it will remove,
death it will weed out,
the (true) path it will show,
extirpated will be the craving
for vain women..... 2

* * * *

Cuts off the roots of fervid Karma;
the pure path to reach Reality-
the Home of Gnosis-
and be redeemed, will it show..... 3

* * * *

It will enable You to gain
the hereditary service
of praising the shapely blossomy twin feet. 4

* * * *

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It will bestow also the Sword of grace
to raze to the ground
the forest of perfidious senses..... 5

* * * *

It will show to us
the Gem that monopolises all our gaze,
the three kinds of Fruit,
the Sugar-cane,
the Candy of the sugar-cane,
the Ambrosia which those in heaven gain,
our King seated on His bull..... 6

The next five stanzas being variants on the same theme as the six, are not summarised. But that six stanzas out of eleven in a decad are devoted to the theme, namely, that pronouncing the subtle Five Letters will enable one to gain the Real and to have a vision of Him, shows how strong was the faith of our Swaamikal in 'Ci-Vaa-Ya-Na-Ma'. That this faith is not one of the early immature years and that this faith survived throughout the life of the Swaamikal is shown by two lines (1315, 1316) in the sacred Arut-perum-jothi-akaval, the 1596 line-long stanza and decad, the quintessence of the experiences of the Swaamikal, the paean of praise of God which is recited early every morning in every shrine dedicated to the memory of Raamalinga Swaamikal. He sings:

"Oh true Mantra
Who are the A,U,M,
and undying Ci and Va.

4615.VI.81 arut-perum-jothi-akaval, lines 1315, 1316

The subtlest of subtle forms of the Five Letters is Ci-Va. It is for this reason that these letters are

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enblazoned these days on the temple towers of Civan in Tamilnadu. Persons who have left the out-going path, the *pravrutthi maarga*, and are on the returning path, the *nivrutthi maarga*, are given initiation into this *mantra* by their gurus. Ci-Va is not only the subtlest of subtle forms of the Five Letters but the Godhead as well.

Our Swaamikal wore the sacred ash and chanted the Five Letters in its gross, subtle, subtler and subtlest forms. Just as Mannikkavaachakar exclaims,

"Did I, indeed, perform thavam
and Ci-Vaa-Ya-Na-Ma gained to chant?.....

Our Swaamikal too is amazed at his good fortune. He sings:

What is the virtuous deed I performed
that I gained the good fortune
of being able to pronounce Civaayanama
with my tongue made of flesh.....

2260.III.6 thiru arul muraiyeedu 90

The privilege of chanting the mystic Five Letters is not assumed by oneself. One has to be initiated by a guru. Who was the guru who initiated our Swaamikal? Let him answer:

"Oh (my Lord, the) great Life
Who, preventing the imprint
of the oft-spoken of world of desires on my mind
at my playful tender age
when I had just been weaned,
imprinted instead on my mind
the Five letters themselves

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which stand out dispelling illusion!
Oh Bliss who occur in my life!
Oh Ether
Who shine like the embodiment of effulgence
rendering the stars impotent!
Oh great Being
Who spread out to contain in Yourself
the endless sky!
Oh dancing King
Who, bestowing a form of light
on men of great thavam who have forsaken flesh,
rise above everything!

4167.VI.57 arul vilakka maalai 78

It would be in the fitness of things to conclude this long series of quotations of songs relating to the mystic Five letters with the following song:

Though the child might forget
the mother who bore it,
though the mother who bore the child
might forget it,
though the soul might forget the body it had
assumed,
though the body which has gained the soul
might forget it,
though the mind might forget
the arts it has learnt,
though the eyes might forget to wink,
and (in fact) cease to do so,
I will never forget Namachchivaaya
which shines forth
from the hearts of men of excellent thavam.

820.II.23 Namachchivaaya sankeertthana lahari 7

Velaayutha Muthaliyaar says that our Swaamikal was "excessively abstemious". This is an

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understatement, as some of the Swaamikal's songs will show, He sings:

You, Who have inseparably mingled in me,
know the hatred I have,
from my early years
of lack of discriminatory knowledge,
towards eating;
what shall I say today?
Even if I am an immature lowly creature,
I desire Your sacred ambrosia of grace only,
Oh unpungent Savour,
Oh my Father,
desire of my sort have I none
towards anything.

3393. VI. 12 pillai-ch-chiru vinnappam 8

Not even an iota of attachment has grown in my mind
to this body which has grown up (to this state),
Whenever I indulged in food
to assuage my hunger,
I ate it with aversion,
I still eat with aversion.
I had never wished
for this malodorous fleshy body
to become stout even the least:
even today I wish it to grow thinner still;
what need is there for me to say this;
it is what You already know.

3397. VI. 12 pillai-ch-chiru-vinnappam 12

Abstemious though one may be, it is difficult indeed to oppose the 'killing' kindness of parents and friends who press on one many a delicacy and insist on one eating it in their presence. The Swaamikal was no exception to this kind of 'cruel' hospitality.

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Sekkizhaar, the 12th century famous hagiographer of Tamilnaadu, whose Thiruthondarpuraanam (better known as the Periya Puranam) has been given the signal honour of being counted among the Thirumurais, writes thus about the qualities of the Servitors of the Lord in his great work:

Men as pure inside as the ash
smeared on their sportless frames resplendent with gems;
by their effulgence they light up every side,
and shine with ineffable glory.

* * * *

Even if the elements five their balance lose in chaos,
never forget they the blossom-feet of Him
with the steadfast by strength of far-famed path of Love;
great rocks of blameless character they are.

* * * *

Endowed with eternal riches which never wax or wane,
shard and red gold both with equanimity they view;
they shine with resolve
which with welling love seeks only to adore,
and seeks not deliverance at all.

* * * *

Wooden beads their necklace, rags their robe,
their duty none other but God's service;
full of compassionate love, they lack nothing;
how can I describe their resoluteness?

* * * *

Of mien and garb as fancy dictates,
unique servitors of the Dancing Lord
of age-long fame; how shall I
here praise or sing their state?

* * * *

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Can one find truer or better words to describe Raamalinga Swaamikal? We are here concerned particularly with the line; "Shard and red gold both with equanimity they view". History of saints in Tamilnaadu records the case of only two persons in the world of Tamil saints who viewed with equanimity a broken piece of a mudpot and gold. Saint Thirunaavukkarasar of the 7th century A.C., one of the Four Camaya-Kuravars or Fathers of the Faith, was one. Before receiving him into His bosom, Lord Civan, at Pukaloor, wanted to show the world of what stuff the saint was made. As usual, the saint was weeding out the courtyard around the temple with his ubiquitous hoe and was throwing away the rubbish into a tank nearby. Lord Civan made rubies and grains of gold come along with the rubbish turned up by the hoe. Let Sekkizhaar tell the rest of the story.

In those circumstances,
while Arasu, who ruled (over his five senses and mind),
was doing his work,
our Lord, in order to show to the world
his remarkable state of mind,
graciously ordained that pieces of the nine kinds of gems
'along with grains of gold
come glittering out of whatever places
his hoe penetrated.
While the red gold and the nine gems
shot their brilliance far and wide,
our lord, King of Speech,
scooped them up along with the rolling about grit,

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as matching each other,
and flung them far to fall in the tank
of teeming soft lotus blossoms.

And before the good man,
who had reached a state
of making no distinction between
grass and grit, gold and gems,
the Lord of Thiruppukaloor, in His grace,
along with the Dame whose forehead
was equipped with bows
came along the skies and descended to earth.

Thus Lord Civan of Thiruppukaloor, for the edification of the world, made the final test before Thirunaavukkarasar to His bosom.

The only other person about whom it is on record, in his own words, that he treated gold and dust alike is Raamalinga Swaamikal. Of this state of mind, he himself sings:

I, with a mind free of pride,
never desired money,
moreover, it is something which You Who are
within me
have always known,
Even in my early years,
when I did not know what is what,
I flung back on them itself
or on the rubbish heap
the money given by those near and dear to me.
I have gained Your great wealth of grace
which is inseparable from me;
what is there to say further?

3395. VI. 12 pillai-ch-chiru-vinnappam 10

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"A strict vegetarian" records the Muthaliyaar. I would call this the greatest understatement of the century. A person may be a vegetarian just because he was born in a vegetarian family or because of some favour received or to be received from God. Or he might have become a vegetarian from conviction. Yet this would be a strictly personal matter with him and he would not allow it to intrude into his relationship with the world at large. Such was not the case with Raamalinga Swaamikal. His vegetarianism was but an outward manifestation by even Buddha himself, or, we might say, to avoid controversy, paralleled only by Buddha. Hear him:

Oh gracious God Who told me;
"All those who take a life and who eat flesh
are not our near and dear kin,
they are outcasts to us;
help them in respect of assuaging the despicable hunger
otherwise do not speak to them
words of courtesy with ardour,
nor give them your friendship here on earth
till they join the desirable True Path,
This, indeed, is Our Command!"
Oh my king of the great dance
Who dance in the Common Hall in Thillai
with men of mayaa-dispelling true thavam
paying obeisance to You!

4160. VI.57 arul vilakka maalai 71

What a stern command, an almost harsh command. But this is moderated by the next stanza and we heave a sigh of relief. The lord goes on to temper justice with mercy and bids:

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"Even though those who do killing (of animals)
and relish flesh are wicked people indeed,
yet, when a specific danger besets them,
so long as you are on this earth,
do not look on it and rejoice
but eradicate their grief,
suffering and fear"
Oh Guru Who solicitously bade me thus!
Oh great Being
Who displayed to me Your feet
and the crown on high
while the tall one (Vishnu), the four-faced Brahma,
the immortals,
and others who are called the pure ones
were looking on!
Do graciously wear my garland (of poesy).

4162. VI.57 arul vilakka maalai 73

I doubt whether even Buddha was given such a stern direction by God or, we should say in his case, by his conscience. Even today, you can see on the outer wall of the compound of the Satya-gnaanasabhai at Vadaloor a notice prohibiting the entry of people who are not vegetarians. This notice was got written by the Swaamikal himself.

A question will arise in the mind of any thinking reader whether the entire world can be taught, persuaded, compelled, to become vegetarian, and if killing of every sort can be entirely wiped out from the face of the earth.

Saints and mystics can be classified into two major groups, i.e., those who have a great concern for the world, and those whose chief concern is their

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soul. The greatness of our Four Camaya kuravars and of Raamalinga Swaamikal lies in that, like Buddha and Jesus before them, they exhibited such a great concern for the world that often it seemed that their spiritual life was in danger of dissipation. But they preferred to be classed with Abu Ben Adam, even at the risk of their spiritual life.

Our Swaamikal's repugnance to flesh extends to even his own fleshy body so much so that he regrets the necessity (for his soul) to live in such a body. Addressing God he sings to this effect thus:

Oh my uncut Gem,
You know my regret of regrets
thinking and thinking
about the filthiness of this putrid fleshy body
and my association with it,
through entering it and living therein.
Moreover, I wasted away
till even my bones shrivelled
and I fainted with quaking heart
at the sight of men who eat tough flesh (of animals).
This wasting away too, Oh Sire, You know.

3450. VI.13 pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 41

This horror was at the root of his vegetarianism.

He slept but little. In the precepts he laid down in a sermon called "Rules for daily Routine", he recommended seven and a half naazhikais of sleep. A naazhikai is 24 minutes and 2½ naazhikais make an hour. Later, in his work called Kudumba-kosham - not a part of the Thiruvarutpaa - he prescribed

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only five naazhikais of sleep, and, ultimately, in precepts preached at the dusk of his life in Siddhi-vilaakamaalikai at Mettukkuppam, he prescribed only one hour of sleep, that is, two and a half naazhikais. He sings thus in this respect:

Oh rare great Effulgence
without end or beginning
Who abide in the Common Hall in Thillai,
I do not know
whether this is a speciality with me;
I find myself sleepy day and night!
Whenever I felt sleep coming on
I lay down with fear;
and whenever I work up,
Oh Civa-Civa,
with continuing fear,
I got up wondering
when sleep will forsake me.

3442. VI. 13 pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 34

Our Swaamikal was compassion incarnate. His compassion included the vegetable world as well. He sings:

Whenever I saw withering crops
I too withered.
I writhed in my mind
on seeing the empty-handed ones
worn out with unassuaged hunger
in spite of begging house to house
faint with hunger;
my heart shook like an aspen leaf
when those who were suffering
from long-drawn chronic disease
happened to come before me
and I saw them;

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I wilted on seeing the down-hearted ones
who are men of unmatched self-respect,
poor though they are.

3471. VI. 13 pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 62

His compassion had no limits. Albert Schweitzer says; "That man is truly ethical who shatters no ice-crystal as it sparkles in the sun, tears no leaf from a tree, cuts no flower". Had he but known about our Swaamikal he would have held him up to the world as the example par excellence for his dictum. I wish you, dear reader, to share with me some of the songs of the Swaamikal on this aspect of his personality, He sings:

Whenever my mind strayed into wordly affairs
due to surging compassion
towards living beings,
I got alarmed
and petitioned Your feet,
and even today petition Your feet;
assuredly, my life and my compassion
are one, not two;
if compassion departs (from my heart)
my life too departs;
Oh unique One in my heart!
I swear this by Your feet.

3506. VI. 13 pillai-p-peru-vinnappam 97

How I feel fettered, constrained, confined, by the limitation of space this book imposes on me. Our Swaamikal's 'arutprakaasa maalai' 'arul vilakka maalai', 'pillai-ch-chiru-vinnappam', 'pillai-p-peru vinnappam', and 'anubhava maalai' all these five decads should be completely translated and

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included in this book. As a second best solution, I am quoting from those decads wherever necessary. You, dear reader, and I have to be content with this.

Our Swaamikal could not bear to hear the harsh cry of birds, the howling of dogs, the sight of poisonous creatures, be they insects or men and women. He cannot stand loud, high-pitched conversation, noisy knocking at doors. The sight of anyone weeping made him weep in response at once. The cry of calf for the cow, the sight of emaciated beasts, even the crowing of cocks distressed him. His sensitiveness to the distress of others was so extreme that when he saw someone approaching him, he fell to wondering in fear what distressing tale that person was about to relate, so much so that he forgot to greet him and welcome him. I will content myself with extracts only from his poems which have a bearing on this aspect of his personality.

I was perturbed by the cawing of crows;
hearing the harsh cry of the kestrel,
I was upset;
I took fright on the striking owl giving voice.

I was stunned
hearing the hue and cry
along with the wailing voice
of the pack of dogs.

I shivered in the heart of hearts
when people talked to each other
in a loud voice.

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Alas, my stomach turned
when, often, people knocked loudly at doors
with their hands.

The same spirit of compassion was at the bottom of the Swaamikal's strong feeling against sacrifices to minor deities. He sings:

Sorely hurt in my mind,
alas, I trembled in my heart
seeing goats, pigs, cocks and sacrificial bulls
being led to sacrifice to what are called
harassing minor deities.
established in our country
under many names.
I was also seized with fear
on seeing the evil temples
of minor deities
which are prevalent in this kaliyuga.

3472. VI. 13 pillai-p-peru vinnappam 63

To our Swaamikal, the life of every creature was as dear as his own life, or, perhaps, dearer than his own. Consequently, he held in the highest regard those who did not make any difference between their lives and the lives of other creatures. He sings:

Whosoever realise that every life has a common source,
and, therefore, feeling compassion towards it,
render help to it,
I learnt that all the actions of such upright men
are, indeed, the actions of the Holy Grace,
My mind is eager to do with delight
menial service to those men
of that infamy-free sacred code of life;
my mouth is aquiver to sing their glory!

5296. VI. 125 thani-t-thiru alankal I

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It is not surprising that, with such a compassionate heart, and uniquely sensitive mind, our Swaamikal's earnest desire should be:

Oh my Father!
Note that it is my desire,
Oh eternally young One,
that, as very personification of mercy,
I should, by Your grace, avert
the intense suffering, fears et cetera
which beset others,
and bestow joy on them,
and that I should induce all the world
to tread the path which shuns
both eating of flesh and killing (of creatures),
and that, I should publicly declare
from the platform praise associated with You.

3407. VI. 12 pillai-ch-chiru-vinnappam 22

It is no wonder that Velaayutha Muthaliyaar says that our Swaamikal went about with a look of constant sorrow on his face. His face was the index of his mind.

Caste, with all its evils, was an anathema to our Swaamikal. I shall conclude this chapter on Raamalinga Swaamikal - the Man, by reproducing some of his songs thundering against castes, creeds, and institutional religions. If only the people of Tamilnaadu had taken note of our Swaamikal's most revolutionary preaching against these institutions which drag a human being into the mire of cruelty, corruption, superstition, ignorance, lack of love and understanding, sins against the brotherhood of Man, and disunity at all levels of life beginning from the

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home and the village panchaayat and going right up to the House of the People, what a glorious people we Tamils would have been today. Alas, our eyes were blind, our ears were deaf, and our heart was stone. Let us listen to the Swaamikal even now and be redeemed. Here are some of his utterances on the subject:

Oh men of the world
who wander about attached
to castes, creeds, religious doctrines,
the hubbub of theology,
quarrels about lineage,
and the rest!
It is not proper
that you should wander about in vain
and be ruined.
There is One Who is a unique Leader
Who dances in order to establish the world
in the just way and the Pure Path;
this is the time for Him to come
to play in the street
the game of the Effulgence of Grace;
I am calling you (to join Him in the game)

5566. VI. 133 punita kulam perumaaru pukalal 1

Ooran Atikal lists as many as 42 stanzas and 8 couplets in stanza 4615, the Arut-perum-jothi-akaval, which thunder against castes and sects. They range from one stanza in the 3rd Book to 41 stanzas scattered in the 6th Book from its beginning to stanza 5805, just thirteen stanzas short of the end of the Arutpaa. If we exclude the one stanza (No. 1972) in the 3rd Book, we see that this hatred of castes and creeds began with the Swaamikal's

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entry into the Illúminative Way, and continued right through his journey on the Unitive Way. The shackles of traditions, the loyalty to family, the respect to parents and elders cannot be cast aside easily or without great mental conflict and suffering. It takes time for Truth to win the heart of man and to drive out all competing factors.

Our Swaamikal very strongly hated superstitious beliefs and practices. He sings:

You bestowed grace on me in particular
with the intent that
all the blind (superstitious) practices
pure fabrications of the books on religion
observed as eternal truths
may be covered over by a rain of dust,
that delusion-free True Creed alone
may established be.
that the world of True may flourish,
You instructed me that right now, when
indifference
(on the part of the people) has ceased,
is the good moment;
therefore, come and abide in me,
Oh You Who uttered the Truth!
You dissolved my rock-like hard mind
and bestowed sacred ambrosia on me,
Oh Crown Jewel of my mind,
Oh my holy dancing Spouse!

3768. VI.28 thiru arut-pukazhchi 9

Thirugnaanasambandhar too hated blind superstitious beliefs. He was about to set out for Madurai to challenge Jain supremacy. On the eve of his departure the building he was staying

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in caught fire and was reduced to ashes. Saint Thirunaavakkarasar, who was with Thirugnaanasambandhar, requested him to postpone the journey as the day fixed for the journey was inauspicious. In reply, the child-saint sang the 'Kolaru-thiru-p-pathikam'.

Since the Partner of Her with shoulders
like the smooth bamboo,
He with the throat which swallowed the poison,
He Who plays the veenaa
and wears on His crown
the flawless moon and the Ganges,
since He has entered my mind,
the Sun, the Moon, Mars, Mercury,
Jupiter, Venus, Saturn,
and the two snakes (Raahu and Kethu)
they all are unqualifiedly good, good indeed,
goodly good are they to the devotees,
exceedingly good they are!

All these stars, constellations and planets, the Saint said, are exceedingly good provided... He put a big proviso. Provided we are devotees of God. But we prefer to go in terror of them, we prefer to allow them to make us arrant cowards, we prefer to be creatures at the mercy of shadows and stars. Thiruvalluvar said; "Fear governs the code of conduct of the vile people".

It was so in his days, and it is more so in these days. Just go along with me into a calculation. Out of 28 days of a lunar month (which are covered by twenty-seven asterisms), fourteen of them (they are listed in the above song) are inauspicious to start

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on a journey or to begin a new undertaking. It works out to 182 days in a lunar year. If this was the entire story, it would be tragic enough. But we have added to this list. We have made the days of the week auspicious or inauspicious. Tuesday is a very much sinned-against day. Then there are inauspicious hours. There is Raahu-kaalam, a matter of one and a half hours a day, and there is yamakandam, another one and a half hours a day. These two account for 45 days in a year. Then there are the ashtami and navami thithis that is the eighth and ninth days from the full moon or the new moon. These account for 52 days a year. Thus a grand total of 280 days are declared inauspicious to start on journey or to begin a new undertaking. Then there are the vaara-soolai days, days on which journey in a particular direction should not be made. Thus we get barely two months or sixty days in a year to do anything, i.e., to be men and not craven cowardly wretches. All because of what? Because we have no faith in the unbounden grace and mercy of God. Because we would not become devotees of God. Could the all-loving God, the all-merciful God, have given us the days hours only to rob us of almost all of them by by one taint of malignity or the other? When we ask ourselves this question, the great truth in Thirugnaanasambandhar's poem strikes us with an outburst of illumination. This is it. No day is evil, all of them are good, very good, extra-ordinarily good, exceedingly good. 14 centuries have passed since Thirugnaanasambandhar

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declared this great truth, but we have not accepted it. More than a century has passed since Raamalinga Swaamikal raised his voice against the superstitions. He sang:

Oh my mind!
Why are you looking for an auspicious time
to think of God Who has transcended time?

4289. VI. 66 nenjodu nerthal 3

All religious works, including the Vedas and the Aagamas are things of speech, speech reduced to writing. That being so, to a contemplative looking down from the heights of realisation of the Real, it is not suprising that all these works appear false and misleading. The Godhead is not to be spoken of. Therefore, the utterances of Raamalinga Swaamikal have to be interpreted in the light of the above explanations. However, the fact that he labelled all these as false and misleading should not tempt us, common mortals, to think or say the same of these scriptures. The guru who instructed me in the Thiruvaachakam used to say that we - he and I were not fit to repeat several of the stanzas of the Thiruvaachakam as we had not the requisite qualification to do so. Similarly, in the case of the utterances of Raamalinga Swaamikal also, we can but reverently read and meditate on certain of them, but we should not arrogate to ourselves the right to repeat those utterances as if they were our own.

The Swaamikal just like Thirumoolar was averse to the burning of dead bodies. He wanted them to be buried. His songs in this respect are:

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You bathe the new born ones
and bring them up to grow big;
you burn the dead;
how on earth do you reconcile
this with that?
As you are capable of setting fire
to those who went to sleep at night
and forgot (to wake up),
you have made your mind
fit to be praised
as a special kind of diamond-like hard rock.
Why were you born
and why do you wander about?

To the great noise raised by the women,
and to the surging noise of the drums
accompanied by the burlesque dance,
alas, you wash the corpse
and take it away and burn it.
Oh corpses yet to die,
if at least the vultures eat it,
it would be of some use;
what profit did you find by burning it?
You found the ash only,
It will not be suitable as manure
even for the dry lands.

5608, 5609, VI. 135 samaadhi varpuruthal 5,6

Such was the man who was Raamalinga Swaamikal. Moderately tall and spare, possessed of a golden unperishing body, clad in white which hid all his body except his face, arms crossed on the chest, modest to the extreme degree, afraid to sit on a high seat or to cross his legs, to let his feet swing down the side of a pial, his body smeared with the sacred ash, given to chanting unceasingly the

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mystic five letters in its gross, subtle, subtler and subtlest forms, extremely abstemious in the matter of food, viewing broken pieces of pottery and gold as equally worthless, a strict vegetarian, dead against killing of animals to petty gods, sleeping but an hour or two in twenty-four hours, filled with compassion for the sick, the hungry, even withering plants, the sorrows of others, distressed by loud talk, harsh cry of birds and animals, loud knocking at doors, spurning worship of petty deities, hating castes, creeds, sects, a stern monotheist, having little regard for the Vedas, Aagamas, Puraanas, Ithikaasas; averse to burning of the dead.

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4. CHILDHOOD

Raamalingam was a headache to his eldest brother Sabhaapathi. He could not get the child to learn under a tutor or under him. He ordered his wife not to serve food to Raamalingam till he learned to be a better student. All to no avail. Sabhaapathi's wife, who loved her husband's very young brother as her own son, was sore beset by the waywardness of an otherwise lovable child. So one day she pleaded with him so tearfully that Raamalingam was deeply touched by her loving sorrow and said, "You want me to study, is it not? Good, give me that small room and provide me with a lamp and a mirror there." This was done and Raamalingam occupied that room with a veritable load of books. What he did behind the closed doors we do not know, but he became learned, far more learned than anyone in the audience who listened to the religious discourses which Sabhaapathi was giving both as a vocation and as a means of livelihood.

How did he gain this ability? To know this, we have to go to an incident which occurred in the room to which our Swaamikal, perhaps a lad of eight or nine, had retired with his load of books and a mirror. He sat, records his biographer, before the mirror and spent his time engaged in meditation on Murukan, the name by which God went in the shrine at Thirutthanikai Hill. And to this child engaged in meditation, even as, in the hoary past Lord, came a vision. Let us hear him relate it:

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The beauty-endowed divine faces six,
the illustrious shoulders twelve
encircled by a garland of katappam flowers,
the lotus feet,
a spear with a sharp blade,
the peacock, the rooster-emblazoned banner,
and the famous Thanikai Hill
with a canopy of a cloud of grace,
these my eyes beheld.

42.1.3 piraarthanai maalai 1

It is worthwhile to relate here a true story which my friend Sri Trivedi Krishnaaji, B.A., B.L., author of Mahatmas, and one who has since taken the vows of a sanyaasi, told me. He said that a deeply religious person was a frequent visitor and sometimes an inmate of the aasram of Sri-la-sri Gnaanaananda Giri Swaamikal at Koyiloor. Once the Swaamikal bade the devotee to go out into the world and give religious discourses. The devotee replied that he had no suitable knowledge for the purpose. Forthwith, the Swaamikal pointed out a large collection of books and directed the devotee to study them. This he did, but without any appreciable advent of knowledge. He reported to the Swaamikal his plight. Thereupon, the Swaamikal directed him to make a bundle of the books, dig a hole in the garden, bury the bundle in it, and sit on top of that spot and meditate. Bizarre as this direction appears to be, the devotee, nevertheless, obeyed it to the letter, and, lo, he had acquired all the knowledge those books had to offer. He was performing bhajans and giving discourses to

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audiences a few thousands strong . His name, you would like to know. He is Haridas Swaamikal.

If the grace of a mere guru who is only human being could perform this miracle, what cannot be done by the grace of Lord Murukan who appeared to our Swaamikal in the mirror in the room or in the mirror of his mind. It is, therefore, not a matter for wonder or disbelief that Raamalingam became a hyperlexic.

Raamalingam's brother did not know what his younger brother was doing, and he did not care to know for he was fed up with this boy who would not be disciplined in any manner at all. Neither did his sister-in-law know. His secret burst forth like a grand Roman candle one evening when Sabhaapathi was unable to keep his engagement to give a religious discourse. Sabhaapathi had been using his little brother to read aloud to the audience the texts on which he based his discourses. So, on this occasion, the organisers of the discourse requested Sabhaapathi to send his brother to entertain the audience by reading from the sacred puraanam and avoid disappointing them. So Raamalingam went and read out from the book of the Puraanam of Puraanams, the Periya Puraanam, the hagiography of the Saints of Tamilnaadu. He read so sweetly and with such seemingly real understanding of the words and the purport of the words well that someone in the audience asked him, perhaps, half in jest and half in earnest, to expound the text. This

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Raamalingam did to the amazement of the audience in a manner that Sabhaapathi had not so far done. Nay, in a manner no other pauraanikar before him had done. The child-prodigy, the super-kid was born. How old was he then? The biographer has no date to go upon, but he could not have been more than nine. Who taught him? Let him answer. He sings:

All Your servitors learn
without considering the fact
that their way (of learning) is round - about
and greatly deceitful;
(therefore) then and now too
they do not realise You,
Oh my master
Who dance a dance of bliss
in the light-radiating hall of Gems!
By Your grace,
it is from You I learnt,
it is from You I heard (my lessons),
it is through You that I realised (You)
it is at Your hands I ate,
it is from You I received (initiation)
it is through You I experienced bliss,
Had I, indeed, performed great penance (in the past)?
Amazing is my good fortune!

3044.V.I. anbu maalai 16

Raamalingam was not taught in a school, he was taught by God Himself. Asserting this, he sings:

Your devotees have brought garlands
of (about to blossom) buds;
saying; "Civa-Civa, obeisance to You",
they rejoice.
The brahmin (priest) has announced

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that this is the hour
when the pure sweet rice is offered
to You at (the hour of rising from) bed;
Oh Great Effulgence of Grace
Who, in the past, without educating me in a school,
instructed me everything;
and, removing all the foibles of the body,
roused me from the sleep (of ignorance)!
Oh my father!
Do, in Your grace, rise from Your bed.

4891. VI. 106 thiru-p-palli-ezhuchchi 7

In a prose writing called samarasa suddha sanmarga satthiya-p-peru vinnappam (Universal Pure True path's True Great Plea), occurs a passage relevant to this subject. The passage is;

"Oh unique Chief, Oh God Who are everything and, yet, are not anything and Who shine filling the interior and exterior of the entire world of mobile and immobile creatures! In my boyhood, without a teacher to impart education to me, You, abiding in my mind, graciously imparted to me an education impossible of being learnt by my own skill!"

A song in ' anbu maalai' takes us further into the details of the varied fields of knowledge covered by this process of being inculcated in the arts and letters without being instructed. He sings:

Oh pure transcendent being
Who dwelt within me,
and Who, after giving Your breast to this infant
who dwelt in the darkness of nescience of
anything,
made a little wisdom accrue,

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then, indwelling my consciousness,
made me cognizant of the Vedas
(ordinarily) the subject of (laborious) study
and the arts without any study whatsoever,
and showing me the true state of grace,
prevented me from going up the evil-thronging path
of religious sectarianism,
and directed me into the true universal path
of holy grace,
and, whenever I *became confused,*
exhorted me saying; "Oh son, do not get confused,"
and rid me of all confusion!

3055. V.I anbu maalai 25

Composing and singing songs were not two separate operations with the Swaamikal. Both were instantaneous and simultaneous. Again, it was God's grace alone and no merit or effort on the part of our Swaamikal which conferred the gift on him. He testifies to this in several songs. He sings:

Oh God Who from formlessness
become one endowed with form!
At an age when I was small in stature,
and, without the least of understanding,
was in the habit of running to play in the street,
scampering about on my tiny legs,
You made me sing songs about You!
Who else has Your cool love?

2218. III.6 thiru arul murai-yeedu 48

Our Swaamikal is so everlastingly and gratefully conscious of his irreparable debt to God for this boon of effortless, instantaneous, spontaneous, composing of songs that he sings his gratitude even at the end of the last Book of the Thiru Arutpaa. Hear him sing:

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In the days of my nescience itself
he called me peremptorily
and bade me compose songs
on His dancing holy feet.
All the offences committed by this mean one
of a mind unfocussed on Him,
He took as mere delightful frolics
and donned my garland,
The great Lord, Nataraajar,
Who, inseparably, mingling in me, tastes sweet,
united with me in marriage,
How can I express here the degree
of the intimacy of that esoteric union
which the Wise One Who is grace incarnate
graciously bestowed on me
that I may thrive
without the worldly attachments destroying me.

5813.VI.142 anubava maalai 100

This boon, this remarkable gift of poesy, conferred on the child Raamalingam was of no mean variety. Raamalingam became an expert in composing poems in an extraordinarily wide variety of metric forms. Ooran Atikal, in the introduction to his edition of the Arutpaa, lists as many as twenty-nine metric forms, some of them of the most intricate kind rarely attempted by poets in the past or present in Tamilnaadu.

Before we leave this aspect of our Swaamikal, we must record that these songs are not laboured compositions contrived with the aid of books on Prosody and Thesauruses, but spontaneous outpourings, products of inspiration of the moment. The Swaamikal's manuscripts rarely show any

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deletion, correction, or revision. And how can there be any correction, deletion or revision when the words are not his but God's. We need have no doubt about this, for our Swaamikal has left many songs which bear testimony to this strange yet true fact. He sings:

I have beheld my spouse
Who has transformed
all my actions as His action
and makes me flourish (on earth);
I have beheld the Elixir
which, instructing me
in the art of making gold,
abides in my mind;
I have beheld my Treasure;
I have beheld my true Guru
of the True path
who, doing away with opposition,
made me shine in the entire world,
I have beheld Him
in the Satya-gnaana-k-koil
(at Vadaloor)

* * *

I have beheld the true Guru,
Who, for the sake of me
who have no compeer in baseness,
came in the dark night
and bestowed grace on me;
I have beheld the true Succourer
Who, accepting all my words as His very own,
embraced me, shoulder rubbing with shoulder;
I have beheld the Chief, my Father
Who has no peer to Him.

3962, 3963. VI.46 irai thiru-k-kaatchi 9, 10

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In the poem quoted above occurs the line "who for the sake of me who have no compeer in baseness, came in the dark night and bestowed grace on me". The phrase "dark night" "appearing in this line is not the night which follows day. Maanikkavaachakar also sings of this dark night. In stanza 4 of decad 37 of his Thiruvaachakam, the decad of the Apprehension of the Godhead (*piditthapatthu*), he sings:

> *"In the dark place I have caught You firmly;*
> *henceforth where will You, at Your pleasure, go?"*

I cannot do better than reproduce the comment I gave on the phrase "the dark place" in my book "Pathway to God through Tamil Literature (1) through the Thiruvaachakam". This is it. "This dark place, in which Maanikkavaachakar tells the Lord that he has caught hold of Him securely, needs explaining. Not all my words can explain it as well as certain quotations from "The Cloud of Unknowing". Its unknown author says:

> 'Cease not, therefore, but labour on until you feel this hunger for God. The first time that you try, you will find only a darkness, as though it were a Cloud of Unknowing, which you do not understand, only that you feel in your will a naked intent unto God. Whatever you do, this darkness and this cloud is between you and your God, and keeps you back so that you may not see Him either by the reasoning of your intellect or feel Him in the affection of your

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heart. Therefore, you will have no other course than to stay in this darkness in the best spirit that you can, always calling upon Him Whom you desire. For if ever you are to see Him and feel Him (to the degree that it is possible here) it must always be in this darkness. If you will continually struggle as I bid you, I trust that, in His mercy, you shall come to His love. Do not think because I call it a darkness or a cloud, that it is any cloud congealed out of the clouds that fly in the air, or any darkness such as is in your house when the candle is out. Such a cloud and such a darkness one can create out of the lightest day of summer, and also in the darkest winter one can imagine a clear shining light. Leave such false images alone. I do not mean such; for when I say darkness, I mean a lack of knowing, such as those things that you do not know or have forgotten are in the darkness. In your present state you are not able to see with your spiritual eye. It is for this reason that it is not called a cloud of air, but a Cloud of Unknowing that is between you and your God'.

I do not offer any apology for the very long exposition given above as it is necessary that we proceed on our journey in the footsteps of our Swaamikal with a thorough understanding of the esoteric phrases he uses in his songs.

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After reading these several poems, nobody can be but convinced that the songs sung by our Swaamikal are not merely songs inspired by God but are songs uttered by God Himself seated in the core of the mind of our Swaamikal. I will modify this statement a little. I will say that a large number of the songs in the 6th Book at least are songs uttered by God seated in the core of the mind of our Swaamikal. This does not mean, however, that I altogether deny this quality to the songs in the other Books. The inspired reader, the reader with insight, the reader blessed by the grace of God, can easily put his fingers on the songs which can but be utterance of God Himself. For instance, the first song of the first decad of the 1st Book, the very first song to ever come forth from the lips of our Swaamikal can be merely God inspired, not God-uttered. That song is a petition addressed to Lord Murukan in the shrine called Kandhakottam in George Town, Madras. Today, it goes by the name of Kandaswaamikovil. Here is the poem.

Oh Kandavel
Who are arisen in Kandhakottam
the flourishing pilgrimage centre
in trees-abounding Cennai!
Oh pure Gem of cool faces!
Oh Gem born of the introspective face of Civan!
Oh divine Gem of Six faces!
Which day is the day of my redemption
when
with holiness-imbued virtuous deeds
in the ascendency,

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talent-increasing wealth
will increase in Your devotee,
when wisdom will increase
that closeness (to God) may increase,
and (in consequence) brimming-over bliss
will increase splendidly.
when, bestowing grace on me,
fragrance-wafting rosy lotus flower-teeming
flower-bed will rise (in my heart)
when the quality of growing mercy
will predominate, (in me)
when the stream of limpid ambrosia will swell,
when You, assuming the form of bliss
will soar up,
when the full effulgence of experience
in which the shape of gnosis rises,
will shoot up,
when You will emerge
mounted on the proud peacock
when Your feet, which are full of compassion
for every creature,
will arise in my heart
that prosperity may swell (in my life)?

I.I.I theiva mani maalai 1

Before we proceed further, it is pertinent that we pause to think of the names and forms in which the Swaamikal worshipped the Godhead from stage to stage of his life. He did not worship many gods. He worshipped the one and only God under various names and forms and in various shrines.

This is as good a place as anywhere else, or to put it more correctly this is a far better place than anywhere else to mention another prayer of the Swaamikal. The prayer we are going to see is the

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product of his mature years. By a comparison of these two sets of prayers, the discriminative reader will discern how far our Swaamikal has travelled, from Kandhakottam to Vadaloor, from 1831 or 1832 to 1867 or 1868, from his eight or ninth year to his forty-third or forty-fourth year, from the stage when

"in the heart of this contemplative
thought of God was born"

to the stage of his journey on the Illuminative Way. Thus the Swaamikal sings:

Oh Father!
You should listen to what I pray for
and bestow grace on me.
I should show love
towards all Your dear creatures.
To whatever worlds there are,
to whatever stations there are,
to everywhere I should go
and, my Father, speak of the fame of Your Grace.
You should so direct Your Effulgencce of Grace
that the Pure Creed of Bliss
should resplendently reign supreme
high up in a lofty state
beyond expression.
Should I do any wrong.
You should put up with it.
Oh my Spouse,
I pray as well for a state
of never being separated from You.

4079. VI.56 suddha san marga vendukol

We note that the first item in the list of petitions made in this prayer is:

"I should show love
to all Your dear creatures".

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The original text is 'naan anbu seyal vendum': 'naan means 'I' 'anbu' means 'Love' 'seyal' means 'do', 'vendum' means 'should'. Love, being an abstract quality cannot be seen. It can only be inferred from deeds. Therefore, our Swaamikal prays, 'naan anbu seyal vendum'. 'Love' is the title of the 8th Chapter of the Thirukkural. The first seven chapters comprise a preface of prologue of four chapters and a definition in three chapters of the persons to whom the Thirukkural is addressed. They are the husband, the wife and the children who constitute a family. Next follow sixteen chapters on the qualities which this family should strive to cultivate. The chapter on 'Love' heads this list of sixteen qualities. Love - anbu - being an abstract quality has necessarily to be exhibited through acts which are prompted by that love. What are these acts? The headings of the fifteen chapters which follow the chapter on 'Love' provide the answer to this question. They are:

Hospitality
Sweet Speech
Gratefulness
Impartiality
Control of the Self
Righteous Conduct
Not Lusting After Another's Wife
Forbearance
Not Envying Others
Not Coveting Others' Wealth
Not Back-biting
Not Speaking Vain Words
Dread of Doing Evil Deeds

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Realising One's Obligation
to Fellow-men
(Philanthropy)
giving to the Poor.

This list does not end here. When these qualities have been assiduously cultivated and, thus, love has reached its fullness, it is transformed into Arul - Charity. As Thiruvalluvar puts it in his inimitable poetic way, Love begets the child called 'Arul'. What is this 'Charity'? The Chamber's Dictionary defines the word as 'Universal Love'.

'Charity' is the highest and most divine form of love. This kind of love is possible only for ascetics. Thiruvalluvar concludes the 3rd Chapter of the Thirukkural on 'The Greatness of Ascetics' with this maxim:

"Since they behave with compassion to each and every creature the ascetics (alone) are the compassionate ones".

The kind of love, again, could be made only through acts inspired by it. It is for this reason that a chapter on 'Charity' heads the list of nine virtues which an ascetic should cultivate in order to gain the quality of 'Charity' even as the householder had to cultivate fifteen virtues in order to gain the quality of 'love'. These qualities are:

Giving up Eating of Flesh
Thavam
Eschewing Conduct Unbecoming an Ascetic
Not Stealing

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Truthfulness
Not Getting Angry
Not Harming Any Creature
Not Killing Any Creature

The word. 'Thavam' in the above list needs an explanation. It is an untranslatable word. It means charity in the heart towards all creatures, austerities, self-mortification, non-attachment, meditation and comtemplation. Thus, 'Love' and its child 'Charity', the highest and noblest form of love, are amalgams of the fifteen plus eight qualities listed in the foregoing paragraphs. Therefore, when Raamalinga Swaamikal prayed that he should show love (do acts) to all creatures, he was praying for all these twenty three qualities, the absence of any one of which will be a deterrent to his doing acts of love to all living creatures. With one phrase "anbu seyal vendum" - "I should do acts of love", he prays to be made into a Saandron, the Perfect Man, of the Thirukkural, the embodiment of all the teaching of the Aratthu-paal, the Section on Righteousness in the Thirukkural. And so, indeed, he became. What a prayer and what a fulfilment!

It is a natural phenomenon with boys who have a pious and religious bent of mind from childhood to be seized with a desire to leave the mundane world and become a *sanyaasin*. Raamalingam was no exception. He relates this incident in the following song:

Oh Sire! In my years of playful childhood itself,
I turned to my good friend next-door, and said;

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"My dear fellow! I have no fancy for this world,
tell me, what about you?
He too assenting, we went away from home
saying:
"Truly we shall renounce this world".
But on Your true grace recalling us,
we returned (to the world).
Oh pure One, this You Know in Your heart of
hearts!
Oh my Father! What shall I tell You today?

3485 VI. 13 pillai-p-peru vinnappam 76

This super-kid, this hyperlexic, this infant prodigy, this child whose unique prayer would make many older persons hang their heads in shame, this child who asked in his very first song when the day will come when Lord Murukan's feet will take abode in his heart, this pert child who challengingly asked God, "Son to You am I not, and legitimate Father to me are You not", had his petition granted in his ninth year. He records this experience in his own songs:

Oh Lamp Who need no trimming
and Who desirously confer whatever is desired for
on those who desire them
while those who desire desirelessness
stand by!
Oh slender Tongue of a flame
Who dance on the Hall in Thillai!
Oh my life's Succour!
Oh Sea of grace Who enslaved me
in my sixth plus third year!
Oh God seated in my heart!
If You do not divine
the thought in the mind of this mean fellow
and graciously say, "Come hither".
what will I do?

2697. VI. 12 atimai-p-pathikam 3

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There is reference to this enslavement in the ninth year in another song as well. This is the song.

Are there anyone who do not want Your grace?
Since not only those above but all those below
petition You that they may prosper here.
is it anything new (surprising)
that I petition You?
Oh Lamp Who need no trimming!
Oh Gem of an Effulgence
Who abide in the Holy Common Hall!
Formerly, when I was six plus three, You enslaved me;
do graciously bestow Your mercy (now).

3597. VI. 17 vaathanai-k-kazhivu 7

There are many more songs which, although they do not specify the age, declare that God enslaved our Swaamikal at a very early age, an age of playful sporting in the street. Before we go into them, I wish to quote here a song which, in my opinion, clearly states the day on which God enslaved our Swaamikal. This song is a very popular one not only with the devotees of Raamalinga Swaamikal, but with all lovers of devotional literature in Tamil. To the best of my recollection, I heard it for the first time in my twelfth year in the house of my maternal grand-father, a devout lover of devotional literature in Tamil. The street I live in is named after him. From morning to evening, and even upto late hours of the night, his house was echoing with the melodious soul-stirring lines of the Thevaaram and Thiruvaachakam and Thiru Arutpaa. The song I wish to quote to you is this:

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Oh cool Tree
which offers me a chance of refreshing myself
in the summer heat!
Oh Shade under the tree!
Oh Fruit mellowed in the shade!
Oh Water of sweet savour trilling in the brook!
Oh fragrant Flower of sweet smell
blossoming amidst the delightful water!
Oh soft gentle breeze blowing on the plaza!
Oh Bliss born of the breeze!
Oh Benefit inherent in the bliss!
Oh Bridegroom Who wed me on the full-moon day
of Chithrai!
Oh King Who dance on the hall in Thillai!
Do graciously wear my garland of poesy.

4091. VI.57 arul-vilakka-maalai 2

Our Swaamikal is not tired of singing about the great privilege of being enslaved by God in his tender years. And well might he be proud of it. For when we look into the case of the Four Camayakuravars we find that Appar was enslaved not earlier than, probably, when he was nearer forty than thirty. Mannikkavaachakar who lived only upto thirty-two years was enslaved after he had been a very trusted chief minister of the Paandiyan King, that is to say, when he was nearer twenty-five than twenty: Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal was enslaved on the eve of his wedding, probably at about his twelfth year (since he is said have lived eighteen years only). It was Saint Thirugnaanasambadhar only who was enslaved - if we can use such a word in the case of an infant - at the age of three. Raamalinga Swaamikal can therefore be justly proud of his

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enslavement, at the age of nine. Let us hear some of his songs, in which, however, the specific age of nine is not mentioned.

The first song is out of the 42nd decad of the 1st Book. This decad is called "*tiru-arul-vilaasa-p-patthu*", the Decad of the leela(play) of the Holy Grace. All the ten stanzas end with the refrain "Oh Deva Deva Who enslaved me in my early years". The twelth year of the Swaamikal was an important land-mark in his life. Later, we will be referring to some songs relating to this age, but the decad under consideration, and the refrain of its stanzas cannot be said to refer to that age. We must presume that the reference is to the enslavement in the ninth year. The song is:

Oh six-faced Sea of great mercy!
Oh Hill of a Gem
in which Theivayaanai takes delight!
Oh King!
Oh Flame born of the great Flame
endowed with a face with three eyes!
Oh great magnanimous One
Who graciously wield a bloody spear!
Oh Clarity which reigns in the hearts
of men of noble character
from whose faces gnosis of Brahmam - the Godhead-
radiates (all around them)!
Oh Flood of bliss!
Oh Deva Devaa
Who, as a great gracious Guru
of belief-inspiring face,
enslaved me in my early years!

450.1.42 tiru-arut-vilaasa-patthu 1

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This entire decad of ten stanzas, as we said earlier, dwells only on this theme of enslavement at a very early age. As the Swaamikal grows more and more old, he is more and more conscious of this great blessing which fell to his lot in his very early years. He dwells on this theme in the 4th Book and in the 6th Book, in his days of journey on the Illuminative Way and on the Unitive Way. Ooran Atikal lists as many as fourteen stanzas.

Ooran Atikal is of the opinion that the several amazing incidents in the early life of our Swaamikal, such as learning without being instructed, worship at the Kandhakottam shrine, vision of God in the mirror, helping his brother during his religious discourses by reading the texts from the books, the maiden discourse, singing about Murukan at Kandhakottam and Thiruthanikai, occurred between the ages of nine and twelve of our Swaamikal. His surmise is probably correct. But I would prefer to place the last item only in the period of these last three years of the childhood of the Swaamikal and place the rest of the incidents in the years before his ninth year. But we need not labour this point as what is material to our purpose is the fact that the period covered by this chapter is the period in intimate comradeship of Raamalingam and Murukan, the period in which Raamalingam became a hyperlexic by the vision of Murukan in the mirror (the mind), became educated without being instructed by any one, was enabled to compose and

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sing songs without any training in prosody, was enslaved at the early age of six and three. This was the period when the 52 decads and 570 stanzas of the 1st Book of the Thiru Arutpaa were sung. We cannot properly conclude an account of the period of the childhood of the Swaamikal without a survey of the 1st Book of the Thiru Arutpaa in as detailed a manner as space would permit. However much I might restrain myself, this survey is bound to take quite a number of pages, the addition of which to this chapter will make it very long. It is better to devote a separate chapter to the subject.

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5. MAIDEN SONG

Devotees of Civan, says Caiva Siddhaantha, are greater than Civan himself. Maanikkavaachakar sings:

The Mistress dwells in midmost of You;
within the Mistress centred You dwell;
Oh our Primal Lord, Whose being knows no end,
Who dwell in the sacred Golden Hall,
if in the core of Your servant both of You do really dwell,
come forward and bestow on me, Your servant,
the Grace amidst Your servant to abide,
that my heart's purpose may be fulfilled.

Sekkizhaar, the great hagiographer of the Saints of Tamilnadu, puts the following words in the mouth of Lord Civan Himself extolling the qualities of the servitors of the Lord:

In their glory themselves they equal,
By devotion they appropriate Me,
By union with Me they conquer the world,
Failings they have none any longer;
Established in unique state they are;
Through their love they enjoy bliss;
Duality they have transcended;
Do you go and join them.

Stanza 196 of thaduththaatkonda puraanam

Raamalinga Swaamikal therefore pays his homage to the Servitors of the Lord in 3 stanzas and gives us, in another stanza, a pen-picture of a non-devotee as well. He sings:

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Glory of devotees

Can a mean worm take hold of strong big live coal,
can a deer jump over the sky,
can a rat hiss at a strong tiger,
can a fly vexatiously shake a mountain with its wings,
will a granite pillar be smashed in two
by a piece of a straw,
will darkness envelop the sun
will rain get wet in the storm?
Never
Similarly, can sorrow attack those
who wear on their heads
the blossom feet of those
who contemplate the golden feet
of Your devotees?
Can desire or anger affect them?
Will their minds be seized by arrogance
or discord?

What Devotees Will Gain

Those who sing the glory of Your devotees will gain
the noble quality of showing pity
on seeing the faces of those
who, driven by hunger through the ways of this world,
come and beg of them;
they will, furthermore, gain love unto Your holy feet,
full measure of years, lands and righteous wealth,
experience of the Real, noble contentment,
innate tolerance, true fame,
a gift of neither ailment nor evil
ever so little encroaching on their lives,
true fortitude and sure shelter (of Your feet)

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The Blessedness of the organs of the Devotees

Oh Sire, the mouths of the blessed ones
who speak Your glory
are holy mouths which have partaken of limpid ambrosia;
Oh Father, the heads of those
who worship Your holy feet
are heads which will wear a crown and flourish;
Oh True One, the eyes of the virtuous ones
who have seen Your holy body
are eyes which shed forth brilliant light;
Oh Lancer, the holy ears of those
who hear Your praise
are ears which will hear
happy news of auspicious events;
the hearts of the noble ones
who contemplate Your feet
are hearts of truly happy form;
Oh Scion (of Civan)
the hands of the great ones
which are joined in worship in Your presence
are hands which will bestow gold (on other).

Our Swaamikal devotes a stanza to give us a contrasting picture of the miserableness of the organs of the unblest creature who does not sing the glories of God. He sings:

Oh Father, the mouth of him
who does not praise You
is a mouth which yearns for even a mouthful of gruel;
Oh our great Lord, the head of the fool
which does not bow down to You is a head
which carries demeaning firewood;
the eyes of the vile one which do not see
the very fragrant body of Yours

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are rotting eyes which exude a barrelful of tears;
Oh God, the ears of the waster
which do hear Your praise
are ears destined to hear mournful news;
the heart of the sinner
who does not think of You
that his bonds may be sundered
is a heart which will quake with terror;
Oh transcendent Being,
the hands of the perfidious one
which do not join in worship in Your presence
are hands which will be stretched out
to receive the sacrificed offal.

Benefits Which Will Flow From Contemplation of Murukan's Feet

Water there will be;
rain-clouds there will be,
fertile land there will be,
and produce too,
wealth, fame, wisdom there will be;
a path with sanctuary at the end there will be,
and stability as well;
a place and name, gems and a job,
clothes and gifts, all these there will be,
food to eat and eat and rejoice,
peace-dwelling mind, prosperity,
chariot, elephant, horse,
and other riches;
everything, there will be,
provided, Oh King, there is contemplation
of Your feet
which wear the anklet of Kadamba flowers
which contain bees
which have drunk the honey in them.

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Murukan's mercy, be it gracious mercy or be it, what is called, marakkarunai harsh mercy, is always fruitful of genuinely benevolent blessing. Our Swaamikal devotes the 21st stanza of the first decad of the first Book to this mercy. He sings:

If you had not bestowed harsh mercy
on Thaarukan who did the mean thing,
on Singamukan (the Lion-faced Giant)
of a thousand eyes,
and on Sooran of unimaginably rare might,
and had not taken them into Your service,
where would the heavens be,
where the drink of ambrosia,
where the life of the immortals,
where their magnificence,
where the rule of the king of the devas,
where their gnosis,
where the contemplation of sages,
where the activities of the four-faced One,
where the performance
of the function of protection by Naaraayanan,
where the conduct laid down by the Four Vedas,
where would all these be?

* * *

In the 4th stanza, he declares his bhakthi and loyalty. He sings:

Apart from respecting those
who sincerely praise You,
the magnanimous One,
if I am told to respect other heavenly ones,
I will not respect them even in my dreams
through oversight even.
Other than Your feet
which have their abode in guileless minds,

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though they were to thrust before my eyes,
the feet of other gods,
and offer them saying; "Sir, love these",
I would stand aside,
looking at them with strong aversion,
There is not the least of any hypocrisy in this talk;
it is the truth;
Do assume lordship over me
and bestow grace on me,
Oh my Father, Oh my Mother,
Oh my Bliss, Oh my Wisdom,
Oh my Love, Oh Kandhavel
Who are arisen in Kandhakottam,
the flourishing pilgrimage centre
in Cennai which cannot be disregarded.

The necessary foundation has been laid for the worship of Murukan and, now, our Swaamikal proceeds to make his vow. He sings:

The vow I have taken is
that, apart from Your feet,
I shall not seek others,
A mischievous dog called "Want"
has come, and, snatching this fruit a good vow.
is, alas, running away;
what shall I do any more,
what shall I do?
I have not the strength
to lift a stick called "Steadfastness"
and beat it;
do graciously look with grace
upon the face of this youngster;
Oh limpid Ambrosia
gained by the heavenly people!
Oh great Rain of mercy!
Oh Rain-cloud!
Oh magnificent One!

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Oh Pupil of my two eyes!
Oh my Bliss!
Oh Ruby that rides the peacock!
Oh Kandhavel
Who are arisen in Kandhakottam,
the flourishing pilgrimage centre
in Cennai
Which You have appropriated to Yourself!

He is initiated by Murukan Himself into the methods of His worship:

Oh Guru Who came into my mind
and bestowed the perception
that through ritualistic worship of Pathi (God)
and similar good rites
the creaturely instrument of understanding
called the mind
will be rid of impure concepts
and stand established in pure contemplation
and, thereby, the state of true union with Pathi
will result;
that, thereupon, buddhi, the power of ratiocination,
free from (the triad of) bonds
will merge in the mind,
and that, forthwith,
the state of absence of incoming and outgoing
will be gained
in the shape of unwavering real gnosis.

Maanikkavaachakar sings:

"When in the hearts of contemplatives
thought of God was born,
and on that Being Who is free from hate
contemplation set in,
six crores of delusive powers
severally began their illusive play"

Raamalinga Swaamikal catalogues these in the 14th stanza and eight more.

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His Delusions

Oh Guru Who taught the truth to me who,
like one who gets confused in mind
by the similarity of things
and sees
water in a mirage,
a thief in the stump of a tree,
a snake in a piece of rope
silver in the mother o' pearl lining a sea-shell,
and gold in heavy brass,
seeing imaginary things in maayai,
was having mental aberrations
thinking of wife and children,
relations and riches,
successful living and self-respect,
flawless body, life, and mind,
introversion and extroversion,
and sky and earth!

* * *

His Desperate State

My mind is not in my control,
my ancient karma does not leave me even the least while,
no love is there to Your feet,
there is no dearer succour to me other than You,
there are none to tell You:
"He is a youngster, You should show grace to him";
nor are there people
to stand in Your presence and ask:
"Why are You showing grace to that wretch?"
Your ever-flourishing grace never decreases,
there is no complaint against You,
You never say "no" to those who beg of You,
You are not a hard-hearted person.

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Darshan of Tiruttani Murugan in the mirror

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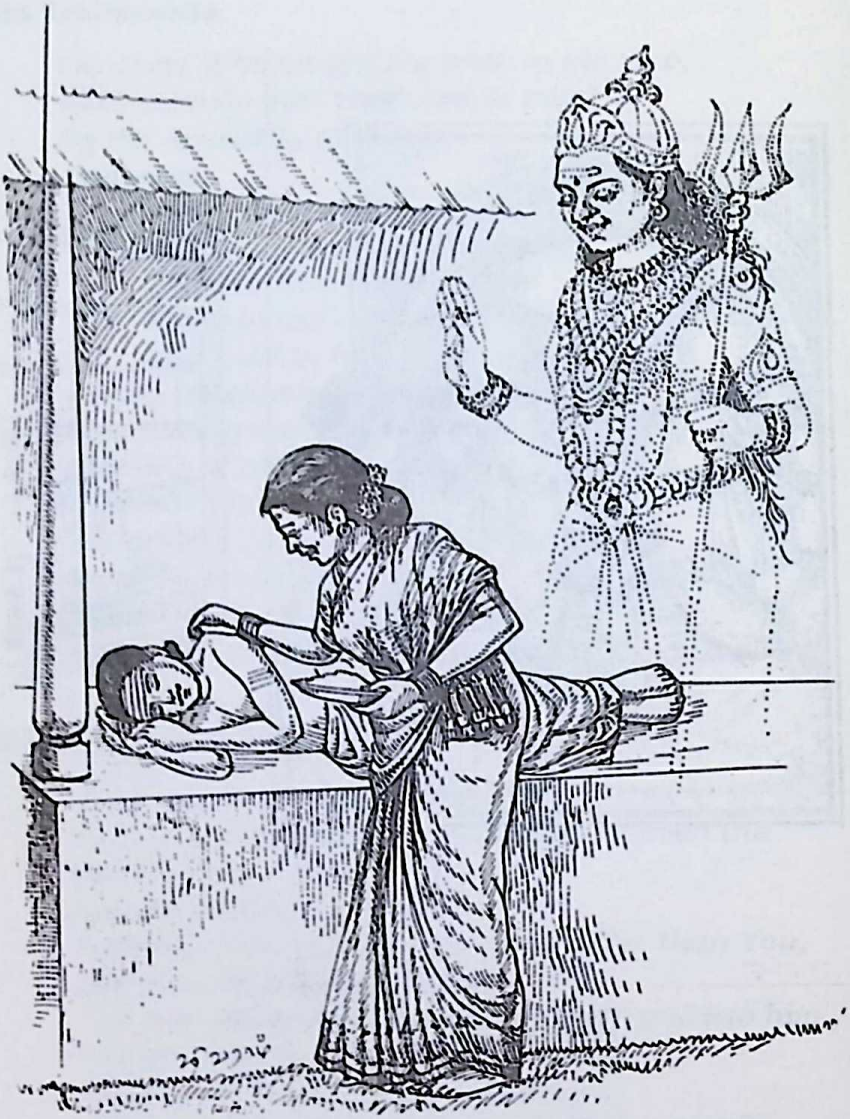

Ambal, in the appearance of Vallalar's Sister-in-law, gives food

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His Shortcomings

I do not mix with noble learned men,
and remain steadfast in their company,
I do not choose a line of learning
and learn assiduously,
I do not melt in my mind,
and think of Your holy Feet,
even in a dream,
I am not a good person;
to do wrong is my characteristic;
if it is Your gracious characteristic
to take all that wrong
as good qualities,
please do away with all my shortcomings
and bestow Your grace on me.

Attachment to Body

What shall I do for this?
I do not give up attachment
to this salt-eroded vessel of a body
with nine holes
out of which seep malodorous secretions,
this body which I have realised in my mind
as a stone thrown in the sky high up,
or as a stream rushing down a mountain,
or as a light in a high wind,
or as a lightning in the clouds,
or as a fluff of cotton or a cloud
in a tempest,
or a mere delusive disguise gifted by karma,
or the egg-shell of a fledgling
which has hopped on to a tree-branch,
or a false dream,
or writing on the surface of water.

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Attachment to Life & Body

I desired the eternally weed-infested life,
performing all kinds of jobs
right from laborious ploughing
earning filth-like lucre in quantity,
stowing away white rice
to the full extent of the stomach,
and growing this body
like a useless othi tree;
Oh Sire, I did not declare this cruel body
a false thing
I do not know whether this is due to
external delusion
or the poisonous delusion of maayai,
or delusion by my fate,
Worship Your twin feet
adorned with anklets,
and, desirous of Your mercy, praise You,
calling You, "Oh my Refuge!"
"Oh my two Eyes endowed
with twice six eyes!"
I did not!

Infatuation with Youthfulness

This youthfulness which wastes away
with the stages of life of this karmic body,
and which the perceptive ones
of enlightenment through study do not want,
is it a daylight masquerade,
or the waters of the raging sea,
or deception,
or the gold of the sunlight,
or a rainbow,
or a water-bubble,
or the bellows which blows air

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that the forge may get fiery hot?
I do not know which it is.
Holding on to this firmly
and falling into the net.
of the bewitching eyes of women,
I have lost my senses to them
and, wallowing in the mire,
am committing sins only,
other than this, I have not learnt
to take hold of Your feet
by even the least bit.

* * *

Tirade against mind

It is difficult to give voice to all this,
What shall I do, what shall I do?
Oh magnanimous One, this mind of mine
which, instead of eternally resting at Your rosy feet,
is beset by love of land, lass and lucre
and revels in them,
is it a maddened demon-possessed wild monkey
drunk with toddy,
and thrashed by a stick,
or the wheel whirled by the oft-spoken-of potter,
or a ball played by a silly girl,
or a cruel beast which pounces with rage,
or a kite whirled about by a high wind,
or an incarnation of time, the Reaper,
or a form invoked by black magic,
or the embodiment of my karma,
I do not know which!

Save me from Temptation of Wealth

Grant me Your grace
that I may not give any thought to wealth

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which, alas, is soul-less stuff,
a never-pleasure-giving thing,
a very huge mass of worry,
a mean thing,
a delusive trap of the outside world,
a deserter, a poison a perfidious tripper,
the flood, that rushes down the river,
the waves of the sea,
a net of arrogance,
the thunder-cloud of the peak of summer,
the raging whirlwind,
the water that runs down the long canal,
a thing which wallows in the mire in an uncouth way
like women without chastity.

Now beset by all these delusive devils, our Swaamikal asks God, with a cry that goes to our heart, when His feet will be implanted in his heart and these devils driven therefrom.

Oh Kandhavel
Who are arisen in Kandakottam
the flourishing pilgrimage centre
in trees-abounding Cennai!
Oh Pure Gem of cool faces!
Oh Gem born of the introspective face of Civan!
Oh Divine Gem of six faces!
Which day is the day of my redemption
when
with holiness-imbued virtuous deeds
in the ascendency,
talent-increasing wealth
will increase in Your devotees,
when wisdom will increase
that closeness (to God) may increase,
and (in consequence) brimming-over bliss,

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when, bestowing grace on me,
fragrance-wafting rosy lotus flower-teeming,
flower-bed will rise (in my heart),
when the quality of growing mercy
will predominate (in me),
when the stream of limpid ambrosia will swell,
when You, assuming the form of bliss,
will soar up,
when the full effulgence of experience,
in which the shape of gnosis rises,
will shoot up,
when You will emerge
mounted on the proud peacock,
when Your feet, which are full of compassion
for every creature,
will arise in my heart
that prosperity may swell (in my life)?

And several other prayers rise up from the depths of our Swaamikal's heart, prayers which you and I and all the world may adopt as our daily petitions to God, our Light in the darkness of doubt and despair, our Saviour from the six serpents of lust, anger, greed, infatuation, obstinacy and pride, and a seventh serpent, rarely spoken of by others, but given by our Swaamikal a prominent place in the evils that stand in the way of an aspirant for the grace of God, the serpent of Killing of living beings. Here are the prayers:

Oh Crown-Jewel of true gnosis
and blissful radiance
Who, bestowing the knowledge
of the majesty of the rare word 'Om',
which occurs in the bliss-laden great Vedas
on sage Agastya,

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was pleased with his contemplation!
Oh Kandhavel
arisen in Kandhakottam,
the flourishing pilgrimage centre
in renown-radiating Cennai!
Oh pure Gem of cool faces!
Oh Gem born of the introspective face of Civan!
Oh divine Gem of six faces!
Graciously grant that I may not be seized by
Anger, the internal foe,
mighty Greed, the utter fool,
violent Infatuation, the wastrel,
gross Obstinacy
also called wicked blind arrogance,
happiness-robbing Envy,
the parasite and evil-doer called Killing,
these seven persons and those related to them.
Graciously bestow on me the grace of leading a life
endowed with women of noble families
called staunch desirelessness,
sons called continuing peace,
good riches called munificence
arising from righteous ideals,
the succour called wisdom
which does away with delusion,
the friend called unfaltering lack of arrogance,
good servant called the mind,
and a place where there is neither
the three taints of ignorance, karma and matter
nor even the state of being tainted by ignorance
only.

Prayer for Association with Good People

Association with the noble ones
who contemplate with one-pointed mind
Your holy blossom feet
I want,

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Association with those
who have in mind something
and speak something else outside,
I want not.
Your renowned praises I should speak;
lies, I should never speak.
Lofty ideals I should hold
and live up to them;
the devil called pride should not possess me.
Forget, I should, desire for ensnaring women,
forget You I should not.
Wisdom I want; the wealth of Your Mercy I want;
disease-free life I should lead.
Grant me this my prayer.
Oh Kandhavel Who abide in Kandhakottam
the pilgrimage centre of ever-growing sanctity
in Cennai abounding in righteousness!
Oh pure Gem of cool faces
Oh Gem born of Civan with the introspective face!
Oh Divine Gem with six faces!

Joy of Slavery Unto Your Feet is Joy Indeed

Oh Kandhavel
arisen in Kandhakottam
the flourishing pilgrimage centre in Cennai
where live men who excel a mother in compassion!
The several days-old rice-washings
in the dilapidated homes
of the pouncing tiger-like curs-
the vile ones-
is collected at the cost of as much labour
as the heavenly ambrosia,
the deteriorated wild rice fallen to the ground
is picked up with as much care as flowers,
the bran is saved as carefully as precious jewels,
the lowly chaff is cherished as verily precious gold.

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Is their enjoyment of these things
an enjoyment indeed?
The joy of setting down in the great life
of slavery unto Your feet
which are beyond the well-researched conclusions
of the Vedas
and gaining thereby the path blest by Your grace
and the state of apprehension of the Real
is joy indeed!

Finally, his Prayer for Enslavement

Oh Bliss that taste sweet
in every corner of my mind!
Oh unique One Who are the Life of my life!
Oh Joy of bliss!
Oh mystic Union (with my soul)!
Oh my great Treasure!
Oh Primal One Who are the prime cause for
mukthi!
Oh Image of true gnosis!
Oh deathless Murukaa!
Oh Nephew of tall Vishnu!
Oh dear Son Whom Lord Civan kisses!
Without making me one among the people
who wallow on this earth,
do enslave me, bestowing on me
attachment to Your feet
which graciously pleased with bhakthi,
eagerly bestow grace,
Oh Kandhavel
Who are arisen in Kandhakottam
the flourishing pilgrimage centre
in Cennai on the shores of the roaring sea.

He was enslaved; the feet of Murukan have been implanted in his mind. He exults in this unique blessing and declares that there is no more any birth or death for him.

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Among the vast variety of subjects in which our Swaamikal received instruction without being instructed, the Vedas were one. He sings in the 8th stanza of decad 84 of the Fourth Book thus:

Oh my rightful Spouse
Who with delight wrote in my mind
all the Vedas never before inscribed
on palm leaves!.

Therefore, it is conceivable that the boy of nine was intelligently conversant enough with the Vedas to pronounce this condemnation of the presumptuous and preposterous claim of the Vedhaanthin. Our boy of nine should have had intimate knowledge of not only the Vedas but also of the fourteen Saastras of Caiva Siddhaanta, for the stand taken by the boys is also the stand taken by the exponents of Caiva Siddhaanta. A scholar researching into the Thiru Arutpaa will find enough material for him to write a thesis that Raamalinga Swaamikal was a Caiva Siddhaanthi. "Perish the thought", I hear some ardent orthodox devotees of the Swaamikal say: I add, in response, Amen, For the Swaamikal was a revolutionary thinker in matters religious and no imprisoning shackles of dogma and doctrine of institutional religions could ever fetter him. He was a free bird of the sky, a lark singing in the soaring heights of sunshine and clouds, of rain and wind, of thunder and lightning, of the sun and the moon, of the planets and the stars, of spaceless space. Some great thinker said (I am unable to recall his name to mind) "When institutions spring up, truth flies out

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of the window". Raamalingam was a child of the Great Effulgence and not a mole burrowing in the dark warrens of dogmas and doctrines of 'isms' and 'itys'. The other stanza is not so easy of interpretation as the one we have just considered. Our Swaamikal sings:

Waist like an hour-glass,
gait like a swan or an elephant,
double-plaited tresses like twin cloths,
breasts called perfidy,
navel spoken of
as luscious pomegranate flower-shaped whirlpool,
eyes called (twin) swords,
face called the full-moon
what shall I do to encompass the death
of the sinner called my mind
who, approaching women of parts thus described,
that I may survive?

When we recall to mind that this stanza was sung at the age of nine, in the very first decad to be ever sung by the child Raamalingam, then we are overpowered with amazement that a mere child, a God-inspired child, a child of very good up-bringing. a child beloved of God, should be tormented with the type of emotions and passions, so vividly described in the stanza under consideration. We ask ourselves; "How can this be? Was this poem really sung by a child of nine? Or is this stanza an interpolation?" We must give very serious thought to this problem. Tackling a similar problem in the Thiruvaachakam, I wrote an exhaustive note. It will be relevant to reproduce that note here. I said:

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Another point which it would be wrong of me to avoid is that of the faults, shortcomings, sins, commissions and omissions of which Maanikkavaachakar accuses himself in nearly 40 per cent of the stanzas in his work. He accuses himself of almost all the cardinal sins as well as many of the venial ones. He accuses himself of lust for women not in one place, but in scores of places in his work. Even in the last decad of his work, he accuses himself of this charge of venery.

Now we have to look at the question squarely in the face. We should not shirk it. I had occasion to discuss this point with some savants and their immediate reaction was horror at my raising the question. Their love, devotion, and regard for Maanikkavaachakar prevent them as much as the common man from thinking for even a moment that Maanikkavaachakar was ever troubled by lust. So an explanation has been found to get over the difficulty which such passages present. The savants and the devotees say that Maanikkavaachakar accuses himself of the sins of the world, in a sort of vicarious manner. This, the savants say, is out of very great love for mankind. They say that Maanikkavaachakar himself was pure and innocent and that he described himself in these terms purely to instruct mankind in the dangers of such sins.

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This interpretation would be true if Maanikkavaachakar had accused himself in this spirit of mind in a few places in his work. But it is not so. In decad after decad, in stanza after stanza, we find Maanikkavaachakar torturing himself with these accusations against himself. These passages are too many to make us believe that they are a sort of a vicarious atonement for the sins of mankind. Moreover, once we accept the explanations of the savants, a large part of the appeal of The Thiruvaachakam to the sinful aspirant is lost. For the one lesson which a reader of The Thiruvaachakam draws is that what Maanikkavaachakar achieved he too can achieve. But if Maanikkavaachakar is put by us on a pedestal of immaculate purity, of an unapproachable purity, then the aspirants lose their hope of ever emulating Maanikkavaachakar.

In that case, was Maanikkavaachakar a libertine? If we take him at the face value of his accusations against himself, he comes out as a libertine of libertines. Is that a true picture of Mannikkavaachakar? Certainly not. While we are on the subject, we may ask another question too. Was Maanikkavaachakar married? He was the Chief Minister of a Paandiyan King. He was said to be sixteen years old. Would a king take a bachelor as his

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minister? If we conclude that Maanikka-vaachakar was married, we may not be far wrong. In which case, the ordinary love-life of a husband led by him might be tormenting him when he began to tread the spiritual path. Roberts Frost sings of:

"A speck that would have been beneath my sight
on any but a paper sheet so white.....

and Dag Hammarskjold paraphrases the same thought when he says:

On a really clean table cloth,
the smallest speck of dirt annoys the eye.
At high altitudes, a moment's self-indulgence
may mean death

And the readers are quite familiar with the advertisements for certain washing soaps. The picture shows two persons, one clothed in an off-colour white garment and the other in a snow-white garment. Let us take these two persons. In the case of the person clothed in the off-colour white garment, another smudge or spot on that is not going to make much of a difference or cause great worry to that person. On the contrary, to the person clothed in the snow-white garment, even a speck of dirt or a pin point of ink causes great grief and she grieves and grieves and grieves that her saree has been ruined. Transfer this analogy to a person like Maanikkavaachakar of immaculate purity of soul and imagine how even a fleeting thought of a woman in terms other than that of a mother or a sister would

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distress him. In one place he says that when the mantle covering a woman's breast was disturbed by the wind, exposing her breasts for a fragment of a second, his attention was drawn to her. To him this appeared as an enormous crime, an unpardonable crime, a sin against God, a fall from bliss. As Hammaraskjold says: At high altitudes, a moment's self-indulgence may mean death.

Satisfying as the above may be in the case of Maanikkavaachakar, it does not meet our present problem on all fours. I venture, with great hesitation, to surmise that Raamalingam the boy of 9 being a hyperlexic, had assimilated a great many of the songs of his predecessors on the Pathway to God, like Arunagirinaathar for instance, without an understanding of their significance, and has reproduced those sentiments in his own words out of a highly retentive memory.

This explanation may help us to get over the problem of how Raamalingam, the boy of nine, came to sing a song of this tenor, but it cannot fully explain how the same theme recurs not only in all the stanzas of decads 18, 24, 25, 27, 35, 40, 46 but in many odd stanzas of other decads in the First Book.

If these were the only songs of this kind in the Thiru Arutpaa, I would have preened myself on having offered through my note quoted from my book on the Thiruvaachakam a satisfactory solution to

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the problem which faces us in respect of such songs. But, unfortunately for me, similar songs are found strewn in plenty on hundreds of pages of the Books of the Arutpaa.

Raamalinga Swaamikal lived, in comparison with many other saints of Tamilnaadu, quite close to us, not more that a century ago, and till about a decade ago, the grandson of Sabhaapathi, the elder brother of our Swaamikal, was alive and had been interviewed by Ooran Atikal who, in addition, had himself photographed in his company. Moreover, there were in Swaamikal's own time two contemporaries of about his own age, who were very intimately associated with him, in one case, for the nearly three decades of the Swaamikal's life on earth. These contemporaries were Irukkam Iratthina Muthaliyaar and Velaayutham Muthaliyaar respectively. The latter was, by his own account a disciple of the Swaamikal from his 19th year till the anthardhaan of the Swaamikal in 1874. If there has been anything shady, anything shoddy, anything to be ashamed of in the Swaamikal's life, these two contemporaries would never have been such committed devotees of the Swaamikal as they were. Therefore, though in the case of the songs occurring in the case of similar passages in the Thiruvaachakkam may be found, I fondly believe, to be acceptable to my readers in particular, and to the earnest devotees of the Swaamikal in general yet that explanation cannot cover all the songs in

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the entire Thiru Arutpaa. We have to seek our explanation elsewhere. I have reflected for several months on this matter. As a result of these reflections I have two points of view to present before the reader. "Spiritual practice" a book by Ananda published by the Advaita Ashram, Almora says:

> *"Till one has realised God, lust will remain to a greater or a lesser degree".*

Thiruvalluvar places his chapter on "Extirpation of Desire" after the chapter "Apprehension of Reality". He says:

> *"Take up attachment to Him without attachments; hold on to that attachment in order to leave (other) attachments".*

It is in the light of the above two sayings that I wrote in my book "Pathway to God through Tamil Literature-(i) through Thiruvaachakam" thus:

> "The body which was an asset so long has become a liability as soon as the Jeevan-muktha state has been attained, as soon as the mystic union with God has been achieved. Liable as it is to disease and decay, to pain and putrefaction, the Jeevan-muktha now longs for release from the body, longs for death. He has obtained, it is true, supreme bliss, but still evanescent bliss, he has obtained union with God, but still not eternal union. The mystic lives with a dread for his companion, the dread of losing the bliss, the ecstatic union

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with God. For, as Thomas Merton says 'there is no infallible way of guaranteeing the mystic against every mistake; he can never be perfectly sure of any human technique'. So the Jeevan-muktha now longs for death, for release from the human body, for eternal bliss and union everlasting".

Arunagirinaathar alone equals our Swaamikal in his amazingly outspoken and profuse confessions to acts of lust. My puzzlement is made much worse by the following songs which flatly contradict all that the Swaamikal had said in the hundreds of songs to which I have referred in the preceding paragraphs. He sings:

When comely women of the city I lived in
took-hold of my hands and forcibly pulled me,
made gestures
and met me in privacy,
and got acquainted with me through alluring talk,
swore false oaths and leaned on me,
and tried to persuade me
by making gifts of many things,
I never embraced them,
I trembled,
yet never chided them,
You know this.

3462. VI. 13 pillai-p-peru vinnappam 53

One phrase in the above poem needs our careful attention. We should return to it again and again and meditate on it constantly. That phrase is "I never chided them". In this, our Swaamikal was

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Christ-like in his boundless compassion. To the woman taken in adultery, Jesus said:

"Woman, where are those thine accusers?
Hath no man condemned thee?"
She said; "No man, Lord",
And Jesus said unto her,
"Neither do I condemn thee,
go, and sin no more".

Are we not reminded of this incident in the life of Jesus when we hear our Swaamikal declare. "I never chided them".

On only one occasion in the half-a-century of his life, our Swaamikal had touched a woman - a woman who was not his mother, or, perhaps, sister. This was the bride he married.

Though the period between 1823 and 1835, i.e., from the date of birth to the 12th year of our Swaamikal has been classified as the period of Kandhakottam, yet from the manuscripts available to us, we get only one decad, namely, the first decad of the First Book, which has as its theme-shrine the temple of Murukan in Kandhakottam which goes today by the name of Kandhaswaami Koil. All the rest of the decads having Murukan as the theme-deity, place Him in Thirutthanikai Hill. There is one exception however. This is the second decad called Kandhar-sarana-p-patthu. This decad does not mention the name of the shrine of Murukan Who is its theme-deity. But, following as it does the first decad of petitions and prayer, this decad can be

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presumed - indeed, Ooran Atikal has done so - to have been sung at Kandhakottam. The theme of all its stanzas is surrender to the feet of Murukan. This is, indeed a fitting theme for a decad which follows the first one. The theme-word is *'saranam'*, meaning 'refuge'. The corresponding Tamil word is *ataikkalam*. All the ten stanzas play on the same theme of refuge with a variety of phrases of adoration.

Oh Content of the Vedas,
refuge, refuge, I seek with You;
Oh Lord of the heavenly ones,
refuge, refuge, I seek with You;
Oh Quintessence of teachings,
refuge, refuge, I seek with You;
Oh Lord mounted on the beautiful peacock,
refuge, refuge, I seek with You;
Oh Sound of Om,
refuge, refuge, I seek with You;
Oh faultless One,
refuge, refuge, I seek with You:
Oh Lord of fame sweet to the ear,
refuge, refuge, I seek with You;
Oh Kandhaa, refuge, refuge, refuge, I seek with You!

41, 1.2 kandhar-sarana-p-patthu, 10

Thus ends the Kandhakottam stage in the life of our Swaamikal.

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6. THE PURGATIVE WAY

Though, in a manner of speaking, our Swaamikal had begun his journey of the Purgative Way even in the first decad of the First Book of the Thiru Arutpaa, we may, however, take that the journey proper commences only from the 3rd decad of the First Book. This is a long journey, a tedious journey, a toilsome journey, a wearisome journey, a journey of dark despair and despondency which is, however, relieved by feeble rays of faith and hope. The journey is characterised by confessions of commission of several prohibited deeds and omission of several prescribed deeds and confession of lack of love - bhakthi.

This journey will take us through hundreds of stanzas of the Thiru Arutpaa, through the whole of the First Book and 74 decads of the Second Book. In terms of number of stanzas, this jounery traverses the weary length of 1384 stanzas out of a total of 5,818 stanzas of the Thiru Arutpaa. Expressed in terms of time, this journey takes us from the 9th year of the Swaamikal to, perhaps, his 30th year, from 1832 to 1853. To put it in another way, the journey it lasts all but, perhaps, five years of our Swaamikal's stay in Madras, it lasts the period of the worship at Kandhakottam, the worship at Thiruthanikai Hill and major part of the period of worship at Thiruvotriyoor.

The biographer of our Swaamikal is silent in regard to the questions whether our Swaamikal

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journeyed frequently to Thiruthanikai Hill, even as he did later on from Madras to Thiruvotriyoor or from Karunkuzhi to Thillai. Thiruthanikai is 84 Kilometres from Madras, not at all a small distance for a boy of nine to cover frequently. In that case, did he go up to Thiruthanikai and stay there for a period of a year or two or three? Or, as in the case of the four Camaya-kuravars with regard to certain pilgrimage centres, was Thiruthanikai a vaippu-t-thalam? A vaippu-t-thalam is a shrine which had not been visited by the Saint who sang of the deity in that place, but a place which was mentioned in a song sung elsewhere. Two stanzas of the 3rd decad of the 1st Book seem to lend support to the notion that our Swaamikal called upon Murukan of the Thiruthanikai hill from Madras and that he did not go there. In the 5th stanza of that decad, our Swaamikal sings:

Even if I do not pay obeisance to You,
do forcibly enslave me,
and, in order to bestow Your feet on me,
do graciously say the words:
"Come quickly to Thanikai".

46.1.3 piraartthanai maalai 5, (extract)

In another song of the same decad, he says that he had not made the pilgrimage to Thanikai. He sings:

I have not sought (You) in Thanikai
with my mouth repeating Your praise,
with my hands folded in worship,
with tears raining from my eyes,

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with body prickling with excitement,
and with cessation
of all egoistic acts.....

64.1.3 piraartthanai maalai 23 (extract)

What is the conclusion? Shall we conclude that our Swaamikal sang most of the songs of Murukan at Thanikai Hill from Madras itself, though we cannot rule out the possibility of his having visited the place a few times in the company of his eldest brother, whose grandson, was named Thanikaachalam, in memory of Murukan abiding on that hill? It seems best to do so.

We deal in this chapter with the lap of the journey on the Purgative Way which takes us through Thanikai Hill on the way to Thiruvotriyoor. Our Swaamikal has recorded his despondency and despair, his diffidence and drawbacks, his failings and foibles, his longings and hopes, his pleas and petitions, in fifty decads, five hundred and twenty nine stanzas.

It would be folly to attempt to describe our Swaamikal's experience in words other than his own. We shall therefore hear from his own lips his experience. Just as the very first decad which the Swaamikal sang is a microcosmic model of the macrocosm which is the Thiru Arutpaa, similarly the third decad of the First Book presents in thirty stanzas all the kaleidoscopic emotional experiences which are described elaborately in the remaining fortynine decads of the First Book. If I but gave a

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translation of the thirty stanzas of the third decad alone, I would have covered the subject of this chapter almost completely. But we would, in the case, miss the extraordinary variety of our Swaamikal's poetic skill, religious fervour, and spiritual experience. Let us now tread in the footsteps of our Swaamikal on the Purgative Way from Kandhakottam on Thiruvotriyoor via Thiruthanikai. I had thought of arranging the selections of our Swaamikal's songs for this chapter in the same manner as I had re-arranged the stanzas of the first decad in the previous chapter. But, on serious considerations, I have come to the conclusion that it is better to quote the selections in the order of the decads. This natural arrangement will disclose better, than all my words can, the turmoil of emotions which assailed our Swaamikal in this period of his life from day to day.

The beauty endowed divine faces six,
the shoulders twelve
encircled by illustrious Katappam garland,
the lotus feet,
a spear equipped with a sharp blade,
the peacock,
the rooster-emblazoned banner,
and the Thanikai Hill
with a canopy of a cloud of grace,
these my eyes beheld!

42.1.3. piraartthanai maalai 1

This is the first stanza of the 3rd decad of the First Book with which begins, what may be called,

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the Thanikaachalam period. This decad is named. "The Decad of Petitions".

This stanza relates the vision of Murukan. The stanza ends with the words "these my eyes beheld". We had wondered whether our Swaamikal did actually go to Thirutthanikai Hill. From these words occurring at the end of this stanza, it would appear that he did not go there but merely had a vision, while he stayed elsewhere. We had seen that Ooran Atikal surmises that this vision took place in the room in Madras. In which case, this stanza goes further to confirm the presumption we have made on an earlier page that our Swaamikal sang the songs on Murukan abiding at Thanikaachalam Hill without actually going there.

The first decad of the lap of the Purgative Way begins with the happy augury of a vision of Murukan in all His splendour. It assured our Swaamikal just as much it assures us that miserable as the journey on the Purgative Way may seem to be, may actually be, yet it is the way which leads ultimately to union with the God-head whose vision was given as a sign of beckoning along the down-hearted traveller. The memory of the vision will be a heartening force throughout the dreary journey on the Purgative Way.

Our Swaamikal bemoans in scores of songs that he had gone begging to perfidious people who would not give away anything. This theme occurs again

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and again in the First Book as well as in the second Book.

In the fourth song of the third decad, our Swaamikal piteously asks Murukan why he is delaying taking pity on him. This is the song:

"Oh my Mother, Oh Father who begot me"
thus wailing, I yearn for you;
how is it, Oh my Father,
that You are procrastinating
without taking pity on this wretch?
Oh Gold,
Oh Rock of good qualities,
Oh King abiding in Thanikai,
Oh beautiful great Gem
seated on the fan-tailed peacock!

45.1.3 piraartthanai maalai 4

"Even if I do not pay obeisance to You. You should bear with me" is the theme of several songs; One of them is:

Even if I,
who, having fallen in the mire
which is the wordly life
am struggling therein,
do not pay obeisance to You,
You should bear with me;
I can no longer endure (this life),
Oh my King,
Oh Ambrosia,
Oh Wealth of grace,
Oh Velavan of Thanikaachalam,
with groves in which honey of high quality
is plentiful

51.1.3 piraartthanai maalai 10

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Once again, our Swaamikal bewails the delay in bestowing grace on him and fears death will overtake him before he receives grace. He sings:

Oh great Medicine,
You remain as if You have not heard
the wail this wretch sets up,
beset by unendurable troubles as I am
in this depraved life.
Oh Ray of an unpierced Gem,
Oh Pure Being of Thanikaachalam,
if days pass like this, what shall I do?
The punishment of death will surely overtake me.

58.1.3 piraartthanai maalai 17

In the ensuing song, our Swaamikal catalogues his shortcomings. The song ends with the phrase, "Oh my Lover!". We can see in this endearing term the beginnings of bridal mysticism, or, what is called, naayaka-naayaki bhaavam.

Apart from saying
that I am Your slave,
I do not quiver with eager excitement
on seeing those
who have arrived at Your feet,
I do not read Your grace-imbued fame,
which Arunagiri sings,
I do not melt with throbbing heart,
I do not bow down (at Your feet),
I do not eschew all the attachments of the mind,
I do not visit Thanikai,
what shall I do,
Oh my Lover!

62.1.3 piraartthanai maalai 21

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"Desires I have none", asserts our Swaamikal, "other than the desire for the feet of the devotees". As in the case of Maanikkavaachakar and, for that matter, the others, our Swaamikal too has very great regard for the devotees of God and longs for their company. Death and Yaman, lord of death are often in the mind. He bemoans what he shall say to Yaman when he calls to take away his life.

The last song in the 3rd decad, from which we have given extracts so far, ends on a note of hope and faith, on a note of utter trust in God.

Oh my Sire!
Oh King ruling over the splendour of Thanikai Hill!
I have learnt to worship You saying:
"Oh Omnipotent One
Who utter words of grace
to those men who, with love in their hearts,
weave garlands of plentiful flowers
that are words of poesy".
Henceforth all my mighty karma will take leave and flee;
the anger of Yaman too
will not prevail over me.

71.1.3 piraartthanai maalai 30

The 5th decad of the First Book is a good example of the misery which our Swaamikal suffers in his journey on the Purgative Way. Its eleven stanzas are a study in despondency and despair, in self-accusation and remorse, in pleas and hope.

Raamalinga Swaamikal, a master of nigandu, Thessaurus, of the Tamil language uses a rare simile to illustrate what kind of a union he wants with

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God. As far as I can remember, none of the Four Camaya-Kuravars have ever used this simile at all or at least in this context. This is an instance of the skill of Raamalinga Swaamikal who uses throughout his large work the most simple words and phrases to express the most obscure spiritual experiences. In this he resembles Raamakrishna Paramahamsa and Jnaanadev.

Oh Munificent One
Who, becoming mother and father,
kith and kin, and friend
to this great demon
who loves scatter-brained women
whom even the demons fear
bestowed on me the cool sea of grace!
I desire that You and I should stand established
as milk and water;
would this be proper,
Oh Lord Who eliminate the cruel birth (and death)
to which I gravitate,
Oh Lord of Thiruthanikai Hill!

138.I.8 aattraa murai 8

* * *

Would You make me hold on to Your feet
and live thereunder (blended with You)
like milk and water-
me of profidious heart who, forgetting Your feet,
wallow here infatuated with delusive life,
of would You make me stand
dazed by the evil charms of women
with eyes like those of sel fish?
Do clearly state what is Your will,
Oh Lord of Thirutthanikai.

140.1.8 aattraa murai 10

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All saints and mystics have always been at war with their mind and heart. For these are in love with worldly pleasures and are at cross purposes with the mystics who wish to proceed to the Godhead, the Ground of all being. Raamalinga Swaamikal too has several decads addressed to his heart or mind. Here is one song out of one such decad.

Oh rotten heart of mine,
we daily spend the day, saying:
"We shall go tomorrow
and worship (Him)!"
Ah me, Ah me,
we have not lived
meditating on the feet
of the Lord of lofty Thanikai,
we have not realised
that this is the moment
when life will desert the body;
what shall we do,
we of unutterable misery?

141.1.9 irantha vinnappam 1

Just like the mind and heart, the body too is, often times, an obstacle to spiritual progress. Our Swaamikal stresses this point in the ensuing song:

Considering this decaying false bodily life as true,
I am wandering here;
today, would I gain Your holy grace
or would I forever be born and die like this
in this world and wallow therein?
Well, Your divine will is my felicity,
Oh Lord in goodly Thanikai!

148.1.9 irantha vinnappam 8

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"Forsake me not", is the theme of the song that follows:

Oh Sire,
Since there is no other refuge anywhere except You,
to this fraudulent fellow,
do not forsake me,
hating me as a wicked fellow,
Oh true Being, Oh Velan of Thanikai!

152.1.10 karunai maalai 2

"Your devotees will blame You" is reiterated in the next song. It may be recalled that Lord Civan at Thiruvaroor commanded St. Sundaramoorthi Swaamikal to first pay obeisance to His devotees before coming into His presence. The approbation of the loving devotees of the Lord is a prerequisite to acceptance by the Lord. This is the reason why Raamalinga Swaamikal and Saint Maanikkavaachakar long before him were very anxious about admission to their company. Here is the song:

Oh my Father!
Oh wise One of Thanikaachalam Who bestow grace!
Oh Velan mounted on the peacock!
If You put up with the great offence
of this mad fellow,
Your genuine devotees will only blame You.

164.1.10 karunai maalai 14

An element of humour is introduced by our Swaamikal in the next song on our list. Depressed as we were, as much as Raamalinga Swaamikal was,

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over his plight, this song, for the moment, with its sly dig at Father and Son cheers us. He sings:

If, as it is said, You are the Son
of Him who receives alms,
what can You do unto those
who entertain desire in their heart,
Oh transcendent Lord
on the emerald-green great peacock,
Oh Lord Kadamba of Thanikai?
which equals Kaanchi (in sanctity)?

166.1.10 karunai maalai 16

For the second time in the same decad, Raamalinga Swaamikal reverts to the matter of joining the assembly of devotees. From this, we can see how much this subject exercised his mind.

Our Swaamikal's reversion in the ensuing stanza to the subject of admission to the company of the devotees of the Lord once again emphasises the importance of such an admission.

Our Swaamikal is ever conscious about his foibles, faults, misdeeds, commissions of proscribed deeds, and omissions of prescribed. He sings:

I do not know Your holy fame,
Oh Lord, I do not rush unto Your feet,
I do not bow down to it,
I do not dance,
I do not sing Your praises,
I do not wear (Your feet on my head) ecstatically,
I do not visit Thanikai,
I do not die,
nor do I have remorse;

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I belong solely to my stomach;
alas, how shall I be redeemed here?

208.1.13 vetkai vinnappam 8

"There are the Six (mantric) Letters and the sacred ash" are the talismanic words with which the Swaamikal puts cheer and hope into himself every time he despairs of his ever being redeemed. The decad in which the ensuing song appears is called "The Six Letters are there", The Six Letters are SA-RA-VA-NA-BHA-VA, meaning "Oh Lord born in the Saravana pool". They and the sacred ash have been there from time immemorial for all to take advantage of, but how many of us take advantage of them! He sings:

Oh Flame of grace difficult to gain!
Oh Omnipotent God!
Oh Deity of Thanikai of prosperity
difficult to bring about by man's artifice alone?
If only a person would pronounce Your Six Letters
that he may be redeemed,
and wear the excellent sacred white ash,
he will gain fame that can never be traduced,
and no harm will befall him.

211.I.14 aarezhutthu unmai 2

Early in this chapter we came to the conclusion that the songs addressed to Murukan on Thanikai Hill were addressed from far-off Madras. The sentence "Won't I at least have a dream of Your hailing me thus 'Come unto Me at Thanikai.'?" lends one more argument in favour of our supposition.

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In chapter 1 we saw how the Lord placed His feet on the crown of the head of Raamalingam, while he was asleep. We saw also that this greatest of all boons was conferred on Raamalingam Swaamikal in the childhood, somewhere between the ages of nine and twelve. All the ten stanzas of the 19th decad of the First Book (which, we may remind the reader, deals with the spiritual life of the Swaamikal upto his twelfth year), from which the ensuing song has been taken, end with the refrain "please place Your sacred feet on the head of this slave". After studying this decad, we are in a position to assert that the Lord placed His feet on Raamalingam's head in response to his entreaty in this decad. The song we have chosen is:

That the torrid spell-binding eyes of women
may not fall on me,
even like the sun on the worm,
and that I may gain admission
into the assembly of Your devotees
who praise You
Who carry a sharp spear in Your hand,
Oh golden Hill of noble qualities
Who abide in Thanikai where Kuyils make love,
Oh Gem mounted on the peacock
with the spreading fan-tail,
do place on the crown of this slave's head
Your sacred feet.

267.1.19 thiruvadi sooda vizhaithal 6

The name of the decad from which the next song has been chosen is "Unendurable Passion". The name itself suggests that the songs would be very

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impassioned. The example chosen here will show how impassioned they are.

Will I never reach Thanikai Hill!
Will I not see the beauty of the Lord?
Will I never leave the helpless state (of the disease)
of birth and death?
Will I never overflow with love (unto You)?
Will I never enjoy the waters of grace
which add beauty to You?
Will I never be relieved of unquenchable thirst
(for Your grace)?
Will I never join the assembly of devotees
who serve You,
Oh Lord of the characteristic of taking pity
on the (people of the) earth?

272.1.20 aatraa virakam 1

Once more we see in the next song that the Swaamikal is much worried as to what the devotees of the Lord would say if He showed grace to him. This frequent concern for their opinion emphasises the belief in Tamilnaadu that while devotees are the slaves of God, God, in turn, is the slave of His devotees.

Apart from knowing
how to spend my days in vain,
I do not know to be steadfast
in cherishing Your feet;
I would not arrive at Thanikaachalam
to join the band of devotees
who strive to perform thavam.
Who am I?
If You give even me
a place there where You are,
when Your devotees ask:

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"Who is this fellow,
what is his qualification?",
who would You say I am?

288.I.21 ezhaimaiyin irankal 7

The Six Letters and the sacred ash come to the troubled mind of our Swaamikal and he takes heart saying that if he pronounces those letters and wears the ash, his misery will be relieved. Accordingly, he sings in two decads the virtues of the Six Letters and the sacred ash.

We are almost amused by the four songs in the next decad which introduce an element of comic tragedy in the midst of all lamentations, and wailings which our Swaamikal has been setting up in the thirty-two decads that have gone by. For, in this decad, he laments that he has no camphor to burn at the shrine of Murukan. One song is given below:

Oh rare medicine (for the disease of birth and death)
who are the Pupil of the eyes
of the Lord with the sacred bead-encircled throat
Who is the medicine to prevent birth in a womb!
Oh my dear Life
Who abide in Thanikaachalam!
What shall I do for a piece of camphor
to light before the sacred presence
of Your abiding in Otriyoor
abounding with riches all round?

371.1.33 kaiyadai muttarkkirankal 2

"Make me do menial service to Your devotees", prays our Swaamikal:

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Oh my Father
Who bestow grace
abiding in Thanikai
where people of every sort worship!
Making the core of my heart
the foot-stool for Your golden feet,
and ridding me of the cruel misery
of going to perfidious people
who resemble highly potent poison,
graciously make me do menial service
to your devotees.

374.1.34 atiyaar pani arula vendal 1

Our Swaamikal has covered nearly three quarters of the distance between Thiruthanikai and Thiruvottriyoor, and we have traversed three-quarters of the First Book. Our Swaamikal has been relating in heart-rending terms his misery, his sins, his undeservedness, his foibles and faults, his lack of love. Nevertheless, he is eager for the mystic union which is the goal of bridal mysticism. In the 37th decad, he gives expression to his longing for that union.

Our Swaamikal is athirst for a vision of his Beloved, and expresses, this longing in ten stanzas in the 38th decad:

Our Swaamikal counts the days and feels aggrieved at the delay in gaining the vision and the ecstatic union:

How many days are yet to pass
before this wretch
can get out of the sea of sorrow,

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Oh great wise Lord in Whose hand
the lightning-like spear scintillates?
Oh Son of Civan
Who are graciously seated
on the thickly wooded goodly Thanikaachalam!
Oh noble munificent Lord
Who are mounted on a peacock!
I do not know the intent of Your holy mind.

420.1.39 naal enni varunthal 1

From the 41st decad onwards, we see a remarkable change in the spirit which pervades the poems. A note of hope, of cheerfulness, of intimacy, of rejoicing, of exultation replaces the note of despondency and despair which marked the decads so far reviewed by us in the First Book. This is the same case with the Thiruvaachakam too where we will find a similar change from the 33rd decad onwards. The ten stanzas of the 41st decad, for instance, are stanzas of exultation with not a trace of misery in them.

As a sure sign of the changes in the mental state of our Swaamikal at this stage of the close of the first lap of his journey on the Purgative Way, the following song is utterly free of any plaint or petition. It is a pure paean of praise:

Oh rare Medicine
Who delight in giving kisses
with Your sacred mouth
to the three-eyed Sire
described as easy of access to devotees,
and to the Mother
Who has borne the world!
Oh Rock of mercy

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on Whom fragrance-laden katappa flowers
blossom!
Oh Karpaka, the wish-fulfilling tree!
Oh Pupil of my eye!
Oh radiant Ray
which makes the lotus
the mind of devotees
blossom!
Oh transcendent Being
Who became the earth, wind, ether, fire, water-
all the five elements!
Oh ineffable Treacle of true gnosis!
On Unique Prime Being,
with a hand holding the spear,
Who destroyed the Asuras
on the devas entreating You
to destroy the entire army of Asuras!
Oh Gem, born of Civan,
abiding in Thanikaachalam, the pilgrimage centre!
Oh Shanmukaa!

470.1.44 selva-ch-ceerthimaalai 1

Raamalinga Swaamikal, we have noted, was very much attached to the sacred ash. He does not tire of singing about its powers to eradicate misery. He tells his heart:

Oh Heart of mine
which, like the boneless worm, suffers
in the grievous company
of loveless perfidious men!
if you would but wear the ash saying:
"Oh Shanmuka of unceasing bliss",
you will gain the environment
where the unique state of no suffering prevails.

484.1.45 seviarivurutthal 5

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Oh my despicable Heart who unwisely loiter
at the doors of perfidious rich men
who have no contentment!
if you wear the ash saying:
"Oh Shanmuka who never desert anyone"!
you will gain the doors of undying state of
Civanhood!

485.1.45 sevi arivurtthal 6

The title of the decad in which the above two songs appear is '*sevi arivurutthal*' - 'Giving Advice in the Ear', that is, letting someone, his own heart in this case, into a secret by whispering in the ear.

Here is a delightful poem in the bridal mysticism style:

Oh Swan on the golden (lotus) flower
that shames gold!
Go unto the Lord on cool Thanikai,
Who inspires a passion in one
that her mother may berate her
and spread gossip shout her,
and tell Him
that I have put you to shame
and have appropriated
your gait.

501.147 ingitha-p-patthu 9

Here is another decad which is a pure paean of praise of the Lord. Such a decad can come out of an exultant heart only.

Obeisance to You,
Oh fragrant newly-blossomed Flower,
Oh Fruit of divinely rich flavour,
Oh Tree Who bestow bliss on Your devotees
that the heat of their sufferings may be cooled!

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Obeisance to You,
Oh King with the anklet-girt feet
which (Civan) the great Chief of demons praises!
Obeisance to You, Oh youthful true Guru!

507.1.48 pattri-t-thiruvirutham 3

The 50th and 51st decads are poems of sheer exuberant delight in the style of bridal mysticism. We quote two stanzas. In the first of these two, the exulting bride-to-be calls her companions to a dance of rejoicing in which they sing the praise of the divine bridegroom to the accompaniment of rhythmic clapping of the hands in unison.

Oh dears, he will come riding on a great peacock!
Oh dears, He will bestow boons
to the grateful praise of devotees!
Oh dears, He is of a fame without any evil in it!
Oh dears clap your hands and dance,
singing His glory!

524.1.50 shanmuka-k-kommi 2

Come, come,, Murukaa
with the divine spear forged from steel!
Spouse of Valli, come!
Oh Lord on the spotted peacock, come!

538.1.51 shanmukar varukai 1

The last decad of the First Book is a miscellany of 21 stanzas, not only in respect of the types of metric forms used but also in respect of the subject matter and their emotional content.

After reading these selections, out of the First Book of 570 stanzas, it may strike us as quite an easy thing to gain the grace of God. We have but to

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relate our woes in the most abject terms, and hey presto, the grace of God will descend on us. Here I am reminded of a Tamil poem which describes the presumptuousness of a turkey. The song goes like this:

A turkey which watched
the grove-dwelling peacock dance
imagined itself to be as good as it,
and danced spreading its vile feathers
and strutting about.....

The careful reader would have noted that no songs representative of the 18th, 25th, 27th, 35th and 40th decads have been quoted. All these decads have as their theme infatuation with women and worse. I have dealt with this subject exhaustively in the concluding pages of Chapter 5 while dealing with the 3rd stanza of the First decad of the First Book, and have, in addition, stated that I would not refer to this subject again in this book. Accordingly, these decads have been passed over.

In the second and last lap of the Purgative Way, our Swaamikal goes from Thirutthanikai Hill to Thiruvottriyoor, from Murukan the Son to Civan the Father, from childhood to adolescence and youth. This jounery occupies two decads in terms of time. It does not end till the Swaamikal is ready to leave Thiruvottriyoor for Thillai.

The twelfth year of our Swaamikal is a landmark in his life. This much only we are able to learn from a few of his songs. We are not able to

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surmise what happened to him in that year other than that he became a devotee of Lord Thiyaagesan at Thiruvottriyoor in that year. This is, of course quite an important landmark in his life. Ooran Atikal states that our Swaamikal commenced his spiritual life properly at this age.

The twelfth year is the year in which a child enters the period of adolescence. We saw that the Swaamikal made special mention of his ninth year and here he makes mention of his twelfth year. This chapter will cover our Swaamikal's life from that year to the time when he is ready to leave for Thillai. The Swaamikal is still traversing the Purgative Way, no longer one of unrelieved darkness and despair. Gleams of illumination light up the Way here and there, growing stronger and stronger till, before we are aware of it, our Swaamikal has left the Purgative Way and has entered the Illuminative Way. This is not to say that our Swaamikal will not, from then onwards, feel any despair or despondence. In the manner in which a bitterly wailing child, which had been consoled and comforted and has fallen asleep brings up a sob and a whimper now and then, more out of the memory of the past than out of immediate suffering, so will our Swaamikal sob now and then till the very end of his journey, till he has united with the Ground of all being. For no mystic ever forgets for even a fleeting moment his total unworthiness for all the grace on him. To the end, he is the basest of base.

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In terms of Books and decads, we will traverse in this chapter, through three-quarters, of the decads of the Second Book. As we proceed, we will find the way growing less and less dark till in the 75th decad of the Second Book we feel we have left the Purgative Way and have stepped on to the Illuminative Way. Other than saying that this decad is called "*Vadivudai Maanikka Maalai*" I shall not say more here but shall reserve my comments till I reach that decad.

In the previous chapter was heard the Swaamikal wondering what the devotees would say if Murukan were to bestow grace on him. He feared that they will not approve of the benevolent act. But now he sings differently.

If You were to put up
with all the misdeeds done by me
and bestow Your good grace on me,
Oh Sire, Oh great God with three eyes.
there is no one to prevent You, saying;
"Why did You show grace to him?"
Oh my King, whoever on this earth has obstructed
the good done by the sky?

586.II.2 praartthanai-p-pathikam 6

The emphasis has changed. It is no more on his foibles, failings and faults. The Swaamikal shifts the blame from himself to the Lord Whom he accuses of delaying the bestowal of grace. He sings:

If You desert me,
laugh will they,
who have received Your great grace,

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Oh Civan, Oh Civan, Oh Civan!
Words of infamy they will say in plenty.
Oh Lord on the white bull,
If you desert me,
who would advise You in a suitable manner,
saying: "Keep this fellow in Your gracious charge,"
Oh Lord impossible for the heavenly ones to find out?

577.II.I karunai vinnappam 7

Far from saying "what would Your devotees say if You bestow grace on me" our Swaamikal now asks for admission into that very band of devotees. This very request shows how far our Swaamikal has travelled up the Pathway to God. Here is the song:

Admit me into the noble sacred assembly
where dwell resplendently
those who have gained the state
where Your grace is ever present;
graciously deign that I may praise
the rosy blossoms-Your feet-
which, formerly, Vishnu as the burrowing boar
wished to reach
and also deign to put up with my falsity!

622.II.5 kali muraiyeedu 12

Who are these devotees into whose assembly our Swaamikal prays for admission? Maanikkavaachakar too made the request. In fact, in his case, it was his one and only request to God. Sekkizhaar, the twelfth century hagiographer of the saints of Tamilnaadu, sings the glory of these devotees in eleven verses. It would be pertinent to know those verses, as Caiva Siddhaantha deems the

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admission into this Galaxy of Devotees as tantamount to conferment of mukthi - release from the cycle of deaths and births.

The 8th decad of Book Two is one of exultation on having a darsan of Lord Civan at Thiruvotriyoor. A note of familiarity and derision replaces the note of abjectness with which we have become all too familiar in the first half-a-thousand stanzas of the Arutpaa. The Image of Civan in the temple is attired in a piece of cloth which is the object of derisive comment. In the few stanzas reproduced below, the word 'kanthai' has been retained. In common parlance, the word means a rag but it also means a loin cloth which stops short of the calf-muscles. Our Swaamikal uses the word in both senses. He sings:

Oh bounteous Sea without waves!
Oh glittering Gold
not the least rubbed on a touch-stone!
Oh Lord with a creeper of matted locks
which grows without restraint!
Why are You wearing the kanthai
which does not reach to the ground?

643.II.8 kaatchi-p-perumitham 1

In other stanzas he asks:

Tell me how You wind the kanthai round You!

* * *

How did You come to get
this old cloth?

* * *

Is there no one to darn
the kanthai for You?

* * *

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Is there no one
who would courageously remove
the kanthai You are wearing
and clothe You in another?

* * *

It would be more clean
to wear the pelt (of the tiger)
than the old kanthai You are wearing!

* * *

If You would Yourself stand clothed
in the much-mended kanthai,
what kind of a gift
would You confer on me?

* * *

Winding round You
this speckless kanthai,
alas, You look like a wandering mendicant;
what shall I do?

* * *

Oh Lord, You are wearing
this much preserved kanthai,
tell me, Oh sire,
have You no kith or kin?

644 to 657.II.8 kaatchi-p-perumitham 2 to 9 extracts

From this note of banter and badinage, the last stanza of this decad most unexpectedly lifts us to great heights of spiritual fervour and we see that all this banter and badinage came out of a heart surcharged with deep love and devotion, ardour and adoration. He sings:

Oh Lord
with the delicate fragrant blossomy feet!
Oh Spouse embraced by the creeper (like Parvathi)!
If one covers himself with this flimsy kanthai,
lo, his stone-like heart melts!

652.II.8 kaatchi-p-perumitham 10

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A note of aggressiveness, impudence, characterises the 9th and 11th decads which confirms our surmise that the misery of the journey on the Purgative Way is getting lighter and lighter. Our Swaamikal sings thus in the 9th decad:

Oh Sea of holy grace!
which tastes sweet like honey!
Oh God Who manifest Yourself as the rain!
Oh flawless Gem abiding in Thirumullaivaayil!
Although I am an insensate person,
a mere mass of flesh,
when I arrived at Your holy temple,
You kept quiet without enquiring
"Why have you come?"
is this the nature of Your holy grace?

653.II.9 arul-iyal vinaaval 1

The 11th decad is characterised by a refrain which runs through all its ten stanzas. "Why don't You open Your mouth and say a word"? asks our Swaamikal. He sings:

You have gained
a sacred name as 'Thiyaagesar'
with which the worthy Vishnu and Brahma praise You!
Oh Lord capable of conferring boons!
When I come unto you
how is it that You do not open Your mouth
and say even a single word?
You do not give a single thing
to those who beg of You;
being so,
why did You take this name?

673.II.11 kodaimata-p-pukazhchi 1

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"If He would not graciously bestow something on us, the great Lord Thiyaagar of Otri is a great beggar of a Lord indeed!" is the refrain of all the ten stanzas of decad 19. Here is one of the stanzas:

If He would not graciously bestow
something on me
who am looking forward to rejoicing at the sight
of His eternal role of being seated
with the Dame, Who bestows grace
on the devotees, (on one side of Him)
and with the lad with the spear (on His lap),
the Lord of gnosis, the Lord at Thillai,
the great divine Lord, Lord Civan,
the great mad Lord,
Lord Thiyaagar of Otri,
is, indeed, a great beggar of a Lord!

776.II.19 thiyaaga vanna-p-pathikam 3

A song in the 20th decad is another pointer to the change in the spirit of our Swaamikal. He sings in most reassuring tones to his heart:

Why are You suffering with yearning?
Everything you think you want
I shall obtain (from God) and give you;
fear nothing;
come rejoincingly with me
Oh my Heart!
Let us go and seek refuge
at the feet of the Pillar (of strength),
our Otriyoor-abiding opulent Father
Who bears on His matted locks
the snake, the luminous moon, and the Ganges.

785.II.20 thiruvadi-ch-charanpukal 2

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Decad 29 is another set of songs of invitation to the mind. He sings:

Oh my Heart!
Don't You Know
that begging from those
who never say 'no'
to those who beg of them
is as good as giving indeed!
Even in your dreams,
do not think of those
who withhold what they have.
The Lord with the flower-becked matted locks
is One Who gives generously
to those who approach Him
even if they are base ones!
He is the Lord of the demons,
He is the Lord with the golden hill as bow,
He is the Hill of gnosis,
let us go to Him at Thiruvotriyoor
and, meditating on Him,
gain the goal of taking birth as man!

880.II.29 nenjai-t-thetral 3

In the 42nd decad there is a stern note of warning to the mind, a threat to part from it. Till very recently the mind was the master, but it is now being shown its place in no uncertain terms. He sings:

I have forsaken the perfidious life;
Oh Mind,
(if you like) take all it offers
and live here;
even if it were poison,
you would eat it;
is it good for me also to desire it?

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I am proceeding today without hesitation
to Otriyoor where abides the great Lord
Who bestows grace on those
who say "You are my refuge";
I have informed you too,
it will not be my fault
(if You do not go with me)

1040.II.42 nenjarivuroo 4

The First Book, as we saw, comprise 52 decads. In all these, there is only one decad, the 17th, *nenjodu pulatthal*, which depicts a struggle with the heart. In passing, we may mention that with Raamalinga Swaamikal, the terms *nenju* (heart) '*manam*' '(mind), '*ulam*' 'or' *ullam*" (mind) all are inter-changeable terms and refer to the mind only. We find the Swaamikal using the word '*nenjam*' in the 1st, 6th, 7th, 8th and 11th stanzas and the word '*manam*' in the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th stanzas of the above decad. On the other hand, in the Second Book of 99 decads (I omit for this purpose the 100th, 101st, 102nd, and 103rd decads) there are thirteen decads - a baker's dozen - addressed to the mind. There is a significance in this which we must endeavour to appreciate. These decads are the 17th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 25th, 26th, 29th, 30th, 37th, 42nd, 50th, 62nd and 65th. These addresses cease after the 65th decad, and ten decads later - from the 75th decad - *vadivudai mannikkamaalai* - we enter a new phase of the spiritual journey of the Swaamikal. In the third Book, however, there is a decad - a long decad, the longest decad addressed

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to the mind, a decad of 1406 lines, a grand homily - which we will analyse in another chapter.

What is this special significance which we must endeavour to appreciate in these decads? These decads are the record of a war, a war which every pilgrim on the Pathway to God wages day and night, at every step of his journey. The enemy is within himself, lives with him, breathes with him, is nurtured by him, and is every moment, covertly and overtly conspiring with ten satellites to prevent the pilgrim from reaching his goal. This enemy is the mind and his satellites are the five sense organs, the eye, ear, nose, mouth, skin, and the five senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. When we think of it, the First Book and the Second book are historical records of one thing only, of the Swaamikal's long and weary war with his mind. In the first lap of the journey on the Purgative Way which is covered by the First Book, our Swaamikal was engaged in skirmishes with satellites of the enemy himself and is fighting a battle of life and death, of spiritual life or spiritual death. By the grace of Lord Civan, our Swaamikal forever and always subdues the enemy, and in the 3rd decad of the Third Book, after pointing out to the fallen enemy all the wrongs he had done, makes him his eternal ally. This is the significance of the thirteen decads of the Second Book addressed to the mind; in fact this is the significance of the Second Book itself. In passing, we may mention that the Second Book lends

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itself to a division into two parts, the first part comprising the first 74 decads and the second part comprising the 29 decads of the rest of the Book. The journey on the Purgative Way ends with this hypothetical first part of the Second Book.

Before we pursue the footsteps of Raamalinga Swaamikal in his journey on the second lap of the Purgative Way, we will be benefited by reviewing our Swaamikal's addresses to his mind in the decads we have referred to above. Here are some representative songs:

Oh vagrant Mind of mine,
listen to this,
Seek the feet of the immaculate One
of flourishing Otriyoor
our patam-pakka-Naathan
If you seek them,
the kingdom (of Heaven) is ours.

755.II.17 nenjodu therthal 2

In passing, we may note that in addressing Lord Civan at Thiruvotriyoor, our Swaamikal used the term 'Shanmuka'. It is clear from this that for our Swaamikal, Shanmuka was not a God different from Civan. Our Swaamikal was a strict monotheist.

Today itself,
it will make Him come riding on the bull,
Him, the Chinthaamani,
the Treasure Which we found
after many days of search,
the Fruit with the crown
adorned by a chaplet
formed by the crescent moon;

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alas, Oh my Mind,
don't you be frightened by karma;
note that I swear on my soul;
do but wear the sacred ash,
saying: "Civaayanama"
the Word with which Vishnu adores Him.

842.II.25 punniya vilakkam 9

You have learnt to wither away,
what is this, Oh my Mind?
You have not learnt to sing
sindhu set to music,
You have not learnt to don false disguise,
alas, who will give you riches?
Henceforth, think of our Lord of Otri
Whom the men of vast learning praise.

846.II.26 nenjodu nekizhthal 2

In the 29th and 30th decads our Swaamikal most earnestly invites his mind to go with him to Him, offering it various inducements. He sings:

Do not be upset, Oh my Mind,
by going to people of stony hearts.
Ask for whatever you think of.
The beautiful Lord praised in the Vedas,
the Lord of the ancient city of Otri
surrounded by groves,
our Lord with a throat darker than night,
the Lord rare to be known by Brahma or Vishnu,
He will give bounteously;
I will receive all He gives,
and hand them over to you,
come with me.

851.II.29 nenjai-t-thetral 4

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In the 42nd decad our Swaamikal is fed up with the reclacitrant mind and addresses it more in sorrow than in anger thus:

Oh Mind!
Imagining life of misery as happiness
you are sunk in delusion;
I do not know whether obstreperous you
would go with me or would stay here;
I am going today itself to Otriyoor
where abides the great nine-aspected Lord
to lead a life of bliss;
I have informed you also;
no blame attaches to me
(if you fail to go with me).

1038.II.42 nenjarivuroo 2

In the 50th decad, our Swaamikal asks the famous question 'quo vadis'- where are you going'.

Where are you still going,
Oh my foolish Mind!
If I but think of the misery
of our being born in the past
here and there and wallowing therein,
my guts twist and turn.
What kind of a sure succour you are to me!
Alas, you have not accepted my words.
If only we would think of our munificent Lord
Who abides eternally in the beautiful Hall,
the state of never being born
will come to pass.

1124.II.50 nenjodu therthel 6

Thillai had already started to call our Swaamikal as will be seen from the reference to Thillai. In this song also, though sung at

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Thiruvotriyoor and addressed to Lord Thiyaagesar, the reference to the place where the Lord abides is given as the beautiful Hall - *ezhilkolum pothu*. *Pothu* is a term which specifically denoted the hall of Gnosis in Thillai. It has never been used by any devotee to denote any other place. Stanza 4 of the decad has more pointed reference to Thillai which clearly shows that our Swaamikal's mind has already turned to Thillai where we shall accompany him in the next but one chapter. Two more songs and we have finished with the War for the Conquest of the Mind. In the 62nd decad, our Swaamikal sings:

My mind baser than a cur
goes towards women lacking in goodness
in spite of my opposing it;
what shall I do?
Though I may not worship You,
You should enslave me here (and now),
Oh Sire,
Oh Lord who are good (to me)
more than my dear mother,
Oh treasure-house of compassion
abiding in Otri!

1247.II.62 nenju nilai-k-kirangal 5

The 65th decad ends this war for the conquest of the mind. He addresses the mind thus in one of its stanzas.

Oh my Mind,
we do not know
whether we would be living on the coming day;
do not ever think of anything
other than the sacred feet

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of the virtuous One of the Hall,
where Thirunaalai-p-povaan worshipped Him,
Who became a very mother unto me at Otri?

1277.II.65 nenjuruttha thirunerisai 4

The Thirunaalai-p-povaan referred to in the above stanza is the famous Harijan saint, Nandanaar whose one ambition in life was to go to Thillai and worship in the month of Maargazhi, December-January. Here is Thillai again calling.

We cannot find in all the 52 decads of the First Book a parallel to the two songs which we reproduce below from decads 23 and 24, their extraordinary self-assurance and faith are pointers to how the battle is progressing. Here are the songs:

Even if I were to live many more days,
or even if I were to die this very moment,
even if I were to enter
the heavenly haven thronging with devotees,
or even if I were to wallow wearily in the great hell,
whatever more (tribulations) may come upon me,
whatever my Lord may do unto me,
I will never forget Namachchivaayam
who having sought out my goodly mind,
is superbly established therein.

823.II.23 namachchivaaya sankeerthana lahari 10

An ear-ring has He,
the pelt of a tiger has He,
a bull that sleeps on the bosom of the sea has He,
the battle-axe and the deer (in His hands) has he,
a begging-bowl, which is Brahma's skull, has he,
Otriyoor has He,
the lofty White Forest has he,

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an eye in the forehead has He,
He is my God!

824.II.24 thiruvarul vilakka maalai 1

Such songs of confidence are not to be found in the doleful dismal decads of the First Book.

"What requital shall I make to You" for making me come to this town of Otri, for giving me a desire to sing about You, for making me learn fame", etc., etc., is the refrain of the 11 stanzas of the Thirty-third decad. We should not forget that our Swaamikal is still treading the Purgative Way. If I were to give a stanza from every decad, it will swell the size of the book without adding materially to the interpretation of the Swaamikal's spiritual journey. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore several guide posts on the Way which give us the answer to the question 'quo vadis'.

Let us proceed on our journey on the path our Swaamikal trod. He is filled with a great longing for a vision of the Lord which he expresses in many decads. In the 36th decad, he gives vent to his pent up longings in as many as 36 stanzas. He cries out:

Oh Father in Otri;
will I never praise
with full-throated voice
Your sacred feet
laden with the fragrance of the Vedas!

* * *

Oh Father in Otri,
will I never hear to my ears' content
Your divine fame!

* * *

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Oh Father in Otri,
will I never inscribe on my heart
Your form.....!

* * *

Oh my Father in Otri
will I never sing and adore You
in Songs fragrant with tunes!

* * *

Oh my Father in Otri,
with no one to call You Father,
will I never, like those before me,
lie at Your feet
embracing it to my great joy!

* * *

Oh Father in Otri,
will I never witness
Your dance on the proscenium
by which You actuate the world!

* * *

Oh Father in Otri,
will I never become a slave
unto those true devotees
who gain Your feet
and thus myself approach
Your delicate blossomy feet!

951, 954, 958, 963, 967, 983, 986.II.36 arul thiratthu alaisal 1, 4, 8, 13, 17, 33, 36 (Extracts)

Such is his great longing that he turns with fury on his sense organs which are the enemies who obstruct the realisation of his deep longings and exhorts them in the ten stanzas of the 38th decad thus:

Oh eyes of mine,
avoid seeing even in your dreams the base ones
who do not wear the ash of God;

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look with love on the servitors (of God)
who wear the sacred ash
which graciously extirpates
the base inner impurities!

997.II.38 civa-punya-t-thetram 1

Thus, the ears are asked to close themselves if those who do not wear the ash were to say anything; the nose is asked to tremble for its dear life if it were to come across the smell of the bodies of those who do not wear the sacred ash; the hands are asked not to give even as much as half a sesame seed to those who do not wear the ash; the feet are asked not to enter their houses, and the mind is asked not to think of them even by oversight.

Driven to despair, our Swaamikal turns with fury, in the 39th decad, on the six passions of the mind, *kaamam* (lust) *kovam* or *krodham*, (anger), *lobham* (covetousness), *moham* (infatuation), *matham* (pride), *aanavam* (ignorance) and *ahankaaram* (arrogance).

Oh witless Kaama,
perfidious slave for sale
you caught hold of me
and, throwing me weeping into the deep cavern
of foolish women,
made me suffer tortures;
I am rising out of it
by the aid of devotees
who graciously have rid me of my misery;
if you will drag me again,
I will cut you down
with the Sword of Grace of Lord Civan

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of vedas-chanting Otriyoor!
Note this for a fact!

1009.II.39 nadumozhi vanji 3

After threatening the six passions with the sword of Grace, our Swaamikal turns again to the Lord to make a declaration. He sings:

Desire I did not the status of Vishnu or Brahma;
even if they beg and say: "Please accept",
I will not accept (those status)
Oh Lord dressed in the big hide of the tusker!
I remain steadfast, hugging to my mind
only the type of life which Your devotees respect;
this is as far as my undecided mind is concerned;
now, I do not know
just exactly what Your will is .....

1022.II.40 avalatthazhunkal 6

This paradox of alternating desolation and faith is an inherent factor of all spiritual endeavour. But it will be clear that the journey is not as dismal as it was and is changing steadily, even though not as rapidly as we may like it to do, in favour of hope, and the end of the journey is not far off. The following stanza is a good pointer in this direction.

You went to the marriage of Sundarar
who had a garland hugging his shoulders
and engaged in a dispute there;
(but in my case)
You need not show any document;
if You would but be pleased to say about me,
"this man is my slave",
I will ungrudgingly perform,
with my mind wondering,
(at my good fortune),

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not one piece of work but any number of them,
Oh Lord Who own resplendent Otri
girt by groves,
Oh Lord with the flag
bearing the emblem of the bull
who is the pure Vishnu!

1182.II.56 koti vinnappam 1

In this frame of mind, our Swaamikal is seized with an intense desire for a vision of the Lord. He sings in the 59th decad:

Alas it is not given to me
to see Your golden face!

* * * *

Oh Civan, Lord of the blessed mystics,
it is not given to me to see
the beauty of Your grace-surcharged three eyes!

* * * *

Oh Lord in Thillai worshipped by good men,
it is not given to me to see
the beauty of the blue-tinted throat of Yours!

* * * *

Oh transcendent Being
with the half-moon shining high
on Your russet-coloured locks,
it is not given to me to witness
the splendour of Your state-drive
in the streets of the city of Otri!

1222.II.59 thiru-k-kaatchi-k-kirangal 10

"Who owns me other than you", is the refrain of decad 67, and as a complement to this statement the stanzas of the 69th decad end with the refrain

"there is nothing I do
other than Your will"

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Again a longing comes over our Swaamikal for one more darsan of the Lord. He sings in the 70th decad.

The Lord with a form
like an agglomeration of limpid ambrosia
in the sacredness-suffused Golden Hall,
the Lord of the blissful gnosis,
the Lord Who bestows a state of bliss
on His devotees,
I saw the budding dazzling smile
suffusing His holy face;
I was (forthwith) rid of my great misery;
alas, won't I see it once again?

1340.II.70 dharisana-p-pathikam 1

I witnessed to the delight of mind
His anklet-girt feet
which perform the dance of blissful gnosis;
Won't I see my Spouse's anklet girt feet
once again?

* * *

Won't I see His beauty once again?

* * *

His ambrosia-like holy face
I saw by the virtue of the well-fulfilled great
thavam
performed formerly in this world
by this mean fellow;
won't I see once again the face of Him
Who is like my eyes to me?

1343.II.70 dharisana-p-pathikam 4

The ten stanzas of this decad are surcharged in this vein with an uncontrollable longing.

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"*Mutthi Upaayam*" is the name of the next decad; it is a decad of tremendous significance. The meaning of the name of the bonds of decad is "Device for Gaining Liberation", Liberation from the bonds of death and birth.

In the 72nd decad, our Swaamikal is lost in wonderment as to what thavam he had performed in order to gain the *darsan* of Thiyaaga-p-perumaan of Otriyoor. All his longings of years and years are now fulfilled and he exultingly sings "What thavam have I performed"? Let me quote the stanza only.

I saw,
with my harder-than-stone-to-melt mind amelting,
the holy feet of Thiyaagapperumaan,
the great Lord Civan Who formerly gave
to the munificent saint of Kaazhi
the palanquin
along with the pearl-studded umbrella
and the golden cymbals;
that vision which I saw,
how shall I describe it;
Oh mother,
what thavam had I indeed performed!

1369.II.72 thavatthiram potral 10

We shall conclude this journey on the second and final lap of the Purgative Way.What miseries our Swaamikal endured on his long journey of two decades and more cannot be imagined by us howsoever many times we may read the 570 stanzas of the First Book and the first 814 stanzas of the Second Book. But I may tell you that traversing through the length and breadth of the 1384

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stanzas, I have felt again and again tempted to drop the research into them, for the stanzas are shot through and through with the terrible agony of a soul in torment reaching out for the Godhead that seemed to elude its every attempt to apprehend it.

Three features of significance should be noted about this decad before we conclude this chapter. Firstly, it has five stanzas. In other words, this decad is of as great a merit as the Five Mystic Letters. Secondly, the last stanza declares, "It has a Dame by its side". Lord Civan was enshrined in the heart of our Swaamikal as Ammai-Appan, as the Father-Mother of all beings. Thirdly, the most important of all the features, is the fact that the dwelling place of this Being described so vividly in the five stanzas of this decad is the mind, the self-same mind which even less than ten decads earlier was obstinate, obstreperous, obstructive, obdurate. Our Swaamikal has received God's grace in full measure and has come out victorious over his arch enemy, the mind.

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7. THE ILLUMINATIVE WAY

To the Mother of mothers, the Mother of the Universe, our Swaamikal has come and is received into Her bosom. In the 75th decad of the Second Book, our Swaamikal sings the glory of the Mother, the Mother who goes by the name of Vadivudai Mannikkam in the temple at Thiruvotriyoor. The very first stanza of this decad is sure evidence to show that our Swaamikal has left the Purgative Way and has stepped on to the Illuminative Way. He sings:

Oh Ambrosia from the sea,
Oh red Sugar-cane
Oh Fruit of the karpaka tree of grace,
Oh Soul in my body,
Oh Experience of the Soul,
Oh Light present in that experience,
Oh rare Medicine,
Who have taken seat on the left
of the Lord of Otri
Who owns the rampaging bull,
Oh Flower of gnosis
whose petals are opening out,
Oh Vadivudai Mannikkam!

1386.II.75 vadivudai maanika maalai 1

To the best of my recollection, our Swaamikal has never before used the term, 'Oh Flower of gnosis!' He uses similar terms in four other stanzas of this decad, terms which he has not used ever before. In stanzas 41, 59, 77 and 83 he addresses the Mother in such terms as:

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Oh Lamp of gnosis
shining with a beauty possessed by none else (41)

Oh Wealth of true gnosis
sought by devotees (59)

Oh Tendril of the flame of true gnosis (77)

Oh Luminous Pillar of pure gnosis (83).

All these terms of address are very significant pointers to show that our Swaamikal has begun his journey on the Illuminative Way, travelling on which he will gain illuminative knowledge of the Godhead. The darkness of his ignorance will be cleared by the 'Light' present in the experience and the bonds of the aanava malam, the primordial taint of ignorance, will be sundered. Our Swaamikal celebrates his entry into the Illuminative Way by the one hundred and one stanzas of this decad in praise of the Divine Mother. Let us hear some of his praise of the Mother:

Oh Vadivudai Maanikkam,
what is the significance
of Your posing as a wife
on the left of Him
the Grace who rules over me --
Who abides in Otriyoor,
You, Who, as the unique grace
of the transcendent One
Who has no one who rules over Him,
removing the primordial taint,
of the soul which is ruled over by Karma,
admit it to the House of Freedom
(from the bond of births and deaths)?

1399.II.75 vadivudai maanikka maalai 14

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Oh Lamp of gnosis,
shining with a beauty possessed by none else,
Who, putting up with their thousands of misdeeds,
bestow grace on those who pay obeisance to You!
Oh glittering pure Gold of highest quality
Who shine on the left of Him
Who resides in illustrious Otri,
Oh Vadivudai Maanikkam!

1426.II.75 vadivudai maanikka maalai 41

There is a stanza in this decad which reminds us of the question Maanikkavaachakar puts to Civan in the last stanza of the 22nd decad of the Thiruvaachakam. He asks there:

"Infinite bliss I gained,
what did You gain from me?"

Our Swaamikal asks in the same vein:

All blessings are through You.
what is the gain to You
through me who have gained You,
Oh You Who have borne me!
Oh Perfect Gem,
dear to the eyes of our great Lord
Who, in the past, bestowed Grace on the Four!
Oh Ultimate Finding of the eternal Four Vedas!
Oh Vadivudai Mannikkam!

1476.II.75 vadivudai maanikka maalai 91

And in the last stanza, our Swaamikal pays obeisance to the feet of the Mother in a spirit of exultation. He sings:

Hallowed be Your rosy feet,
obeisance to the lovely lotuses, Your feet.

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hallowed be Your blossomy feet,
obeisance to Your cool grace,
hallowed be Your glory,
may You and Him of Otri Who delights in You
dwell in my mind,
hallowed be You,
Oh Life of my dear life.
Oh Vadivudai Mannikkam!

1486.II.75 vadivudai maanikka maalai 101

From the 77th decad to the end of the 99th decad, all the 23 decads are cast in language of bridal mysticism. Students of the Thiruvaachakam of Mannikkavaachakar will remember that the 16 decads (7th to 22nd) dealing with the pilgrim's journey on the Illuminative Way are cast in language of bridal mysticism. Similarly, these 23 decads of the Second Book which deal with our Swaamikal's journey on the Illuminative Way are also cast in the language of bridal mysticism. Raamalinga Swaamikal is the bride and Lord Civan at Otri is the bridegroom. These decads are characterised by a sense of joy and wonderment. The very titles of the decads, are redolent of love, joy, happiness. Some of the decads are conversations between the love-lorn bride and her mother, some others are conversations between the bride and her companions.

Lord Thiyaagesar of Otri comes riding in state on the streets of Otri. Raamalinga Swaamikal, our love-lorn maid, went with the rest of the people of the town to witness the procession. She saw Him

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and instantly lost her heart to Him. The 77th decad describes in her own words what happened to her. She sings:

Behold, I went along with the people of the town
and saw to the surging delight of my heart
the state drive of the great Lord Thiyaagesan
of the city of Otri endowed with eminent fertility;
my bra-bound breasts
swelled to the size of hills,
the bangles on my wrists became slack,
Oh companion of mine with beautiful tresses,
amazing it was how I stood transfixed
as very embodiment of desire!

1493.II.77 thiruvarul-p-peru 1

When Thiyaaga-p-peruman of the city of Otri--
rare for Vishnu to apprehend--
was coming on a state drive,
my big infatuated mind and I
went front and back and saw Him!
Thereupon I kept sighing after Him.
In spite of my mother and others dragging me,
saying:``Come away",
I did not go with them;
Oh my companion with dark magnificent tresses,
amazing was the way I stood transfixed
as very embodiment of desire!

1502.II.77 thiru-ulaa-p-peru 10

Having been suddenly smitten by love, the next logical step is to send a messenger of love. The crane and the parrot, conventional messengers of love, are, accordingly, sent by our love-smitten bride. She bids the crane:

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Oh Crane, go before Him
Who burnt the cities three of His enemies,
Him Who abides in Otriyoor,
Him Who is good to everyone, the mighty One,
Him of ever truth-uttering pure words,
and, standing in His presence, say:
"The damsel with tresses bedecked with flowers
now wears flowers no more;
she of dark tresses
is tossed about in a river of tears;
surrounded by demon-like women,
many many of them,
and slandered by them,
she fell down,
but, saying 'ah, this is a bed'.
she forsook it forthwith".

1507.II.78 naaraiyum kiliyum naatturu thoothu 5

The parrots are bidden by the Bride to carry a message to her beloved:

Oh parrots, won't you go before Him
Who is not subject to change,
Him with the golden bow,
Him of the city of Otri.
Him of ever truth-uttering pure words,
and tell Him;
"The damsel with flower-laden tresses
no longer wears flowers,
she goes and comes restlessly
and does not stay in one place,
she cries 'alas',
she does not play with girls.
she does not relish food".

1508.II.78 naaraiyum kiliyum naatturu thoothu 6

Decad to decad the love-play gains momentum till it culminates in the 99th decad. Many of the

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stanzas do not lend themselves to translation as they are couched in puns. The 81st decad, in all its ten stanzas, is full of delightful exchange of badinage between the love-born maiden and her beloved, the Lord of Otri, but I am afraid none of them can be translated as the badinage depends upon the pun on words which, though spelt and pronounced in the same manner, give two widely different meanings. For instance, let us take this song, the last line of which I reproduce as it is in Tamil.

The Lord with the victory-laden battle-axe,
the Lord with the bull,
the Lord Who has Mount Meru as His bow,
the great Lord Thiyaagar
Who shines within those
endowed with minds of good quality,
He came close to me;
while all the girls around me
talked about it and laughed,
Otri irum endru uraithen naan,
Otri irunthen endraare!

I told Him, "Stay at a distance"
Otri
He replied, "I am staying at a distance"
Otri

1558.II.81 sallaapa viyan mozhi 5

The pun is on the word 'otri'. Such songs show the lightness of the heart of our Swaamikal who not long ago was singing songs of a different kind with a very heavy heart.

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"Words of Joy" is the title of the 82nd decad. But the stanzas belie the name. For instance, the love-lorn maiden sings thus:

The Giver, the Giver,
the Giver of the principal called mukthi,
the Lord Who abides
in the pilgrimage centre called Otri,
He Who would not mingle in the minds
of those who would not embrace (His feet)
The Lord Who wears
the fragrance-laden kondrai-flowers,
the great Lord Thiyaagar
sought by Vishnu and Brahma,
'Come, will He; come, will He'; thinking thus,
I kept looking forward to His coming,
but, alas, he never came!'

1566.II.82 inba-k-kilavi 3

The above song is a lament, yet the decad is called 'Words of Joy'.

"Why do you love Him"?, is the refrain of the next decad. The mother of the love-lorn damsel points out to her daughter the disqualifications of her Beloved and asks her, "Why do you love Him"?. All things that are great about the Lord are listed as disqualifications in the songs of this decad. The mother addressing her love-lorn daughter says:

He has no town of His own,
He has mortgaged it,
relations he has none,
enemies he has not,
He has never been born,
nor has He died anywhere,

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speech He has not,
equals He has not,
mother, father, friends,
or persons born with Him,
none has He;
Oh daughter of mine,
why do you love Him?

1580.II.83 inba-p-pukazhchi 7

The love-lorn maiden is seized with a great desire to witness again the state drive of her Beloved. She firmly declares that she

will not sleep,
* *
will not talk to her mother,
* *
will not lie down on the mat,
* *
will not tie her loosened tresses,
* *
will not drink even a sip of water,
* *
will not deck her hair with flowers,
* *
will not cease weeping,
* *
will not take even a grain of food,
* *
will not sing or dance,
* *
will not desire anything in the world,

without witnessing her Beloved coming on a state drive. Here is one of the stanzas:

Oh damsel with coral lips!
Unless I see and praise,

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with my palms joined over my head in obeisance,
the dear Thiyaagar residing in Otri,
where grow in abundance cocount groves,
as He comes on a state drive
with the crescent moon shining
on His plaited locks,
I will not eat even a grain of food!

1591.II.84 thiru-ulaa-t-thiramai 8

The bride's mother who, not long ago, was opposed to her daughter's love for the Lord of Otri, is amazed at the good fortune of her daughter in gaining the love of the Lord of Otriyoor, and congratulates her in the ten stanzas of decad 85 one of which is:

Oh daughter of mine
with lisping speech sweet as honey!
What kind of a thavam
is the thavam performed by you
that you had union,
to the cool delight of your body,
with Him Who has a deer in one hand,
comes on a young bull,
wears the fragrant kondrai flowers,
wears milk-white ash,
is the Lord of all creatures
is of the colour of coral,
has on his many-plaited locks
the cow-horn-shaped crescent moon?

1598.II.85 viyappu mozhi 5

The mother of our love-lorn damsel is very greatly perturbed at her daughter's infatuation with the Lord of Otriyoor. She tries to persuade her to give up her foolish infatuation. She says:

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Oh daughter of mine!
You thought
that he is One endowed with an eye on the forehead
which will do away with taking life in the womb,
that He is impossible of being seen
by Vishnu or Brahma,
that He destroyed by His silvery smile
the cities of those who would not surrender to Him,
that He is the rich man
called the Lord of Otri
where abides the goddess of wealth;
haven't you known about His going abegging?
What will you gain
by this unceasing infatuation?

1687.II.92 thiru-arut-perumitham 2

But the love-lorn damsel replies that she will never cease loving Him. She says:

Even if He Who owns the world
mortgaged his city,
even if He of unparalleled fame
wandered about as a kaapaali
danced in the burning ground
along with ghouls,
Oh companion of riotous eyes,
I will not give up, even in my dreams,
my love for Him.

1696.II.93 kaathal-sirappu-k-kathuvaa maalai 1

Throwing modesty to the winds she is ready to go to the Lord of Otri and declare her love and ask Him to wed her, but she is restrained by the fear that He may reject her love. Addressing her companion, she sings:

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If I, swallowing my pride,
went of my own accord
to the Otri-abiding eminent One,
Whom the god in whose honour
the Onam festival is held
praises and adores,
and said; "Do embrace me in marriage",
Oh damsel with eyes like those of a doe,
suppose He asks: "Who are you?"
would not all mankind despise me?

1708.II.94 aatraa virakam 1

There is no parallel in the poetry of Western countries to the love-poetry of the East, particularly Tamil poetry on Love. Much is lost in the translation, and very much more when only a stanza or two out of dozens are chosen for translation. And when the subject matter of such poetry is not mundane love but love of God Almighty, then we can say with absolute certainty that no similar literature exists in any of the languages of Europe or England or America. The forward minx that is our love-lorn maid decides to force the issue. She describes the unexpected result in the 95th decad. She sings:

And when I, leaving modesty behind,
came to witness the state drive
of the Lord of the eternal four Vedas,
Thiyaagar of Thiruvotri,
the Wearer of snakes as ornaments
snatched the bangles from my flower-like hands
and ran away
without turning back to see me;
thought I ran after Him,
I could not catch up with His flight!

1718.II.95 kaathal kaatchi !

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With the next three decads - the 96th, 97th and 98th - concludes the journey on the first lap of the Illuminative Way. We can pass over the 96th and 97th decads as 36 of the 42 stanzas of these two decads are repeated in the 98th with slight and unimportant modifications. The remaining six stanzas being of very much the same tenor as the 165 stanzas of the 98th decad, they too need not be considered here. We shall concentrate here on the 98th decad which is a very crucial one in the history of our Swaamikal's journey on the Illuminative Way. As I said before, the first lap of the journey on this Way concludes with this decad.

This decad is called Ingitha Maalai. The primary meaning of the word *'ingitham'* is 'sign' or 'indication' to one's thoughts. It is not an outright and outspoken declaration of one's thoughts but a delicate indication by a word or phrase (or even a physical gesture) which, having more than one meaning, can be correctly interpreted only by a person in tune with the mind of the speaker. In the decad, the subject matter of such indication is love. The 'indications' are couched in terms of the greatest intimacy, an intimacy appropriate to the nuptial chamber only. We may recall to mind that this decad is one of the series of 23 decads cast in bride and bridegroom relationship (*naayaka-naayaki bhaavam*) and is the last of that series. Unlike most of the decads in the Thiru Arutpaa, this decad has two sub-headings. One is "*Paataanthinai*". This

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means learning of the fame, powers, munificence, love etc., of a person and proclaiming them to the world. This decad proclaims the fame, powers, munificence etc., of Lord Civan of Otriyoor. The second sub-heading is "Section on a Human Maid Falling in Love with God". "The Human Maid" in this case is Raamalinga Swaamikal and the God is Lord Civan abiding in Thiruvotriyoor. We will find in the stanzas of this decad our love-lorn maid declaring to the world the fame, prowess, munificence etc., of Lord Civan of Otriyoor. We will also find her declaring her love for Him which brushes aside all barriers reticence. At the same time the love of Lord Civan for her is declared through her recounting His love for her. Lord Civan comes to her doors as a stark naked mendicant. And she offers her uninhibited love, for her surrender, for her unqualified, unreserved and total surrender. This is the esoteric meaning of this apparently esoteric decad. Let us review a few stanzas. What is quite innocuous and, in fact, sublime in Tamil with its age-long history of poetry in the bride and bridegroom tradition, will turn out to be obscene in an European language. Therefore, I do not propose to reproduce here large number of stanzas from this decad. Nevertheless, as a crucial decad in the chapter on the Illuminative Way, some stanzas must be reproduced.

There are a minimum of two meanings to each stanza. One is the overt sense in which the words

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were uttered by the love-lorn maiden. There is, in addition, the covert meaning which too may have been intended by the love-lorn maid or may be attributed to her words by the bold lover. The love-lorn maid addressing her bosom companion says:

The Owner of the sacred Otri temple,
He who bestowed grace on eminent Vishnu,
I addressed Him thus;
"Oh Lord Who over-powered the great beast, (the elephant),
Do not go away,
but be pleased to take food today in my house,
and, after taking rest, you may depart";
He said "Give"
and when I gave,
He says, "You have cheated me,
What is this, Oh my companion"?

1777.II.98 ingitha maalai 6

The misunderstandings, if it can be said that there was one, arose out of the phrase:

'neerekalavi makizhnthu indru!

This can be taken as;

neer	*ekal*	*avi*	*makizhnthu*	*indru*
You	*do not go away*	*food*	*enjoying*	*today*
neere	*kalavi*		*makizhnthu*	*indru*
You	*union (with me)*		*enjoying*	*today*

Let me cast the song as the Lord understood it.

"Do not go away,
but be pleased to have union with me today,
and go after taking rest in my house".

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The Lord took it as an invitation to love-making, and it is no wonder that when mere food was served as alms to Him, He felt cheated. In this song, we see the incipient advances on the Unitive Way.

This is the advance made by the soul to God for the union that is bliss.

In some editions of the Thiru Arutpaa this decad ends with the following stanza which in other editions forms separate decads.

Oh Lord of fascinating beauty!
Oh Lord Who have mortgaged (Your city)!
"Have You any home?"
I asked;
He answered:
"Women will desire an eye-filling husband
in preference to a handful of wealth;
have I one wife alone!
In truth, I have many many wives,
Oh damsel with imperceivably slender waist!"
What is this, Oh my companion"?

1937.II.99 kan niraintha kanavan 1

The pun is on the word, "*manai*" which means home as well as wife. In bridal mysticism God is the only male, all the souls, are women. He is the bridegroom and the souls are the brides. So the Lord answers, I have many many wives. Thus, Raamalinga Swaamikal has woven in this decad of 165 stanzas the great truths of bridal mysticism.

From here we pass on to the second lap of the journey on the Illuminative Way, which takes us on

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to the Third Book of the Thiru Arutpaa. It is fitting that our Swaamikal, the love-lorn damsel who has been invited by the Lord for union with Him, who has been betrothed to the Godhead, should now praise the holy feet of the Lord. The feet of the Lord are not anatomical organs made of flesh and blood, bones and nerves. In the words of Saint Thirunaavukkarasar:

They are
the knowledge learnt (at the feet of the guru),
the Content of that knowledge,
the resonant Vedas,
of the Vedic Brahmins,
and the sacrifices.
They constitute the heavens and the earth,
the brilliant beautiful red fiery sun
and the cool moon,
they are source and the end
(of everything).
Such are the feet of the Lord in Aiyaaru.

In 128 lines - 4 stanzas, each of 192 feet - our Swaamikal develops the content of the above poem of Thirunaavukkarasar. If any epitome was needed for our Swaamikal's poem, nothing else than the poem of Thirunaavukkarasar will be more appropriate and comprehensive. Thirunaavukkarasar's poem is the *sootram*, the aphorism, and our Swaamikal's poem is the *Bhaashyam*, elaborate treatise thereon. Our Swaamikal praises the Lord's feet in gratefulness for His condescending to wish for and come forth for union with Him. This is the Te Deum of our Swaamikal of Lord Civan. I must

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confess to inability to translate the last part of this decad. Four lines which appear as a preface to this poem pictures to us the state of mind of our Swaamikal at this point of time in his journey on the Path. He sings yearningly:

Whether today it would come or tomorrow itself,
or it would never come, I do not know, Oh my King
the bliss of transcending even the etherial barrier,
and remaining in the sohum state,
rid of the oppressive cruel delusion
of an aanava malam!

Our Swaamikal will very soon be leaving the Illuminative Way and will be crossing the threshold of the Unitive Way where God with name and form will disappear and where ultimately the worshipper and the worshipped, the seeker and the sought, the soul and the Godhead, will merge into each other. In preparation for that day, in eager anticipation of that day, Our Swaamikal gratefully recalls to mind all the pilgrimage centres with temples where Lord Civan abides in name and form, and in a sense, takes leave of them. This is the significance of Vinnappa Kalivenpaa, the 2nd decad in the Third Book of the Thiru Arutpaa. In this decad of 417 *kannis* (couples) our Swaamikal calls on the Lord abiding in 279 pilgrimage centres and makes a petition to Him with this preface:

Oh father of immaculate Kumaran,
Oh my dear Father, Oh my Mother,
Oh Pure One Who have commandeered my mind itself
as Your temple!

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Oh Lord Who possess handsome eight shoulders!
Oh Lord Who possess me,
Oh Lord with bees-buzzing kondrai garland
on Lord chest!
Oh Lord easily accessible
to the eyes of Your servitors to feast on!
Oh Lord impossible of being seen
even in their dreams by Rudhran, Vishnu and others!
Oh Ancient One with the golden body
who extirpate the ignorance.
of even people like me on this earth
and bestow bliss!
Oh Lord with lightning-like red matted locks
Who bestow grace
on the Three, and the devas and every one
that they may not be seized by fear!
Oh Lord Who are benevolent
to one and all in this vast world!
Oh Lord Who are omnipotent!
Oh Lord Who perform the great dance
that all the throng of moving and unmoving
creatures
may altogether merge on the doomsday
in the haven of Your feet!
Oh Lord Who are prior
to all the devas who have been (falsely) acclaimed
as true gods in this world!
Oh Lord Who perform the five essential offices
(of creation, sustenance, destruction,
withholding knowledge, and bestowal of grace)
in the capacity of five deities,
assuming for the purpose
the colours of the pure white, gold, red,
black and grey respectively!
Oh Lord Who, becoming the five elements,
such as the earth et cetera,
becoming the two orbs of light,

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becoming the soul and naadam and vindu,
pervade everywhere!
Oh Lord Who wear the beautiful cool white ash!
Oh Lord with the long lock of hair
harbouring a river!
Oh Lord
difficult to find however much one may search for You!
I have a petition to make to You,
Do not mistake me and despise me,
I am telling You everything as it is
without hiding anything.

1962.III.2 vinnappa-k-kalivenpaa, couplets 280 to 291

In the next 79 Kannis (couplets) our Swaamikal catalogues mercilessly all his own failings. If one were to say that in all the 570 stanzas of the First Book and the 830 stanzas of the Second Book, our Swaamikal had not so far accused himself of such shortcomings, such commissions of prohibited things and omissions of prescribed things, one will not be far wrong. Dwelling on the unique invitation by the Otri for union with him, our Swaamikal is overwhelmed by an enormous sense of unworthiness to become His bride. In this state of mind, he confesses in 79 couplets to all the sins in the calendar. Summing up his narration of the failings, he says in the 370th couplet:

What is the need of sorting them out
and relating them severally?
All the evils discarded by dedicated ascetics
are my riches,

and proceeds to say that it is not proper for the Lord to enslave him. He sings:

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Therefore, it is not proper for You
to enslave this cur
who, like a ghost,
is crazily fond of this world.

Having listed all the acts of spontaneous and undeserved acts of grace performed by Lord Civan in the past, our Swaamikal praises the Lord in three more couplets before making his petition. He sings:

Though there are in this world of attachments
thousands of loving mothers,
yet, Oh loving Lord,
would they ever become like You?
And though there are numberless fathers,
who with pleasure look after their children.
Oh Lord, would they match You in love?

* * *

Oh my Lord,
noted for the ornaments worn by You,
I swear by You,
there is no succour for me
other than You !

1962.III.2 vinnappa kalivenpaa couplets 387 to 389

Now begins his vinnappam - petition. In 27 couplets he gives voice to his petition.

I am filled with remorse, Oh Sire,
note that it will befit You
to put up with all my misdeeds!

* * *

Oh Lord with the blossomy feet
unreachable even to Vishnu
who formerly performed penance therefore!
Don't betray me to the god of death!

* * *

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On this earth surrounded by oceans
where milk-white conches abound,
do not make me sink once again,
in the cruel sea of bondage of birth!

* * *

Do not make me nurture my body,
going therefor to the awful houses
of people who do not stay
in the ancient path (of righteousness)
and meditate on You!

* * *

Oh Lord Who dwell in the minds of men
of well established way of life!
Do not direct me into evil ways!

* * *

I am, plagued by my foolish mind
which does not obey my words,
even though I entreat it saying:
"Do please behave with restraint here (in this world)!",
I am confounded by my mind
which, like the mischievous monkey
which ascends on the branches of the tree.
on which it dwells,
ascends the (tress of the) forest
which is this deceptive world!

* * *

1962.III.2 vinnappa kalivenpaa, couplets 390 to 394

Now follows the crowning petition - the petition of petitions. He sings:

Do please encircle me (with Your grace);
admit me too into Your band of devotees;
hallowed be Your blossomy feet!

Maanikkavaachakar also prayed:

Rid me (of this cycle of births)
and induct me into the fold of Your devotees.

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Having made this petition, he seeks for the co-operation of his mind in the next decad, the 3rd in the Third Book. He devotes as many as 703 couplets -1406 lines - to plead with his mind to be on his side. For the mind does not die with the body in which a soul has taken birth but follows the soul from birth to birth till it is shed by the soul when it attains mukthi. The mind is the store-house of all the experiences, vaasanaas, and, therefore, of all the karma, acquired by the soul in birth after birth. It is, therefore, the seat of the diathesis of the soul, i.e., of the latent proclivities which are the result of the vaasanaas.

Therefore, in this long decad our Swaamikal delivers a homily - we may say that he reads the Riot Act - to his mind in 703 couplets. This dialogue with the mind is on a plane very different from the 13 decads in which he addressed the mind in the Second Book. The past addresses to the mind were bitter diatribes against a recalcitrant mind. The present address is however not a diatribe, though the omissions, and commissions, of the mind are elaborately catalogued here too. It is a catalogue of past misdeeds rather than of present lapses in conduct.

How shall I describe or give a sample of the grandeur of this decad. I shall try and give an abridgement - I should say.

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Apostrophe to the Mind (3 couplets)

Oh my Mind,
may you ever remain
resplendently unshakeable
like (Mt.Meru) the golden mountain!

Oh my Mind
who never desert me
not only in seven births including this one
but in whatever other births as well!

Remain very quiet here by me
and listen to just this one word
which I, a youngster, utter.

Description of the attributeless Brahman (53 couplets)

He Who is the unique prime Being
Who pervades all the world, 4
He Who is eternal, attributeless,
unmoving, immaculate, true,
He Who is Is-ness incarnate,
He Who is the (36) elements, 5
He Who is the Law,
arrogance-extirpating a, u, m, and Om
and their content, 14
He Who is big, small
neither big nor small,
rarity of rarities! 20
He is He Who, as the transcendent Dancer,
stands as unsurpassed bliss
in the state of utter silence which prevails
when
the assault of the taints has ceased to be,
the body, the storehouse of the thatthwas
has ceased to be,

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speech and mighty mind have ceased to be,
joy which causes remorse later on has ceased to be,
earth and the heavens have ceased to be,
fleeing day and night have ceased to be,
the knower, knowledge, and the known
have ceased to be. *53 to 56*

Description of Brahman with attributes

He Who hurries into the loving minds of devotees,
He Who is devoid of cruel evil,
He Who is the Lord of everyone,
He Who is omnipotent,
He Who is the colour of the sunset, *57,58*

He Who is the superbly clever One
Who disappears when the four Vedas,
Brahma and Vishnu seek Him,
He Who seeps into one's vitals,
He Who seeps into the sentiency of those vitals,
He Who seeps into the epicentre of that sentiency,
He Who abiding therein, seeps forth as ambrosia,
He Who,
spreading like the clouds,
which pour down clear water,
and becoming cool like the moon,
tastes sweet like honey if a person
abandons the base false (path)
cherishes the true path,
gives up egotism,
holds fast to true experience,
catches hold of the raft
which is the rosy lotus flower-like feet of the Lord
that arrogance, which is blazing like a fire,
on which ghee has been poured, may extirpated be,
wears the white ash, bathes in a stream of tears,
while the body trembles and hair prickles on end.
melts in his bones,
melts in his vitals,

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melts in his joy-filled life,
melts with love,
becomes an embodiment of love,
abandons all hardness of heart, and
daily pays obeisance in these words:
"Oh virtuous One!
Oh Lord with the matted locks,
with a crescent moon thereon,
Oh Lord with the golden chaplet of flowers!
Oh our Succour!
Oh Kind Who bestow grace of Your devotees
in the very manner they wish for!
Oh Ambrosia!
Oh sea of great bliss!
Oh our Kin!
Oh unassayable Gold!
Oh Gem, Oh Pupil of my eye!
Oh Real Being,
Who delight to ride on the bull!" *121 to 129*

* * *

Yes, such a One, indeed, is our God,
Who, taking us under His service,
will bestow on us the perfect state
which cannot be gained by even Vishnu! *157*
He is Lord Who owns us
without ever forsaking us
wherever we may be on this earth
or wherever we may be in heaven and other
places.

* * *

If we but see beauty of His Ganga-laden locks
and the grand beauty of the tender shoot of the
moon, *208*

* * *

If we but see the gracious beauty
of the Mother living on one side of Him
like emerald embedded in a perfect ruby mountain.

* * *

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If we but behold the beauty
of His famed red coral like form,
our hunger will disappear;

* * *

If we but keep seeing daily the splendour
of the golden form of Him Who as His abode
the minds of those who are like water,
all misery will be extirpated;

* * *

If we but stand near those who,
becoming embodiment of service to Him,
sing His fame in poems,
and listen to them,
all Karma will take leave of us;

* * *

If we say but once
"Oh eminent Lord Who reduced to ashes without delay
the cities of the enemies",
are the sorrows of the world would cease;".

* * *

No sooner than You meditate on Him
for me moment saying:
"Oh transcendent Lord of Bliss
Who dwell in the core of the mind
which ever sings Your praise",
all evil will flee from you. *232 to 237*

* * *

But, alas, If I tell you;
"Go unto the flower
that is His dancing feet",
you retrace the step you put forward. *238*

* * *

Even after hearing from amidst the sea of books
the gracious manner of His bestowing the Sea of Milk.
on Vishnu who feeds the world
and on (Upamanyu) the child who cried for milk.
you do not bow down to Him:

* * *

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Is not this one instance
sufficient for those with wisdom
to gain love for Him? *239, 240*

* * *

Righteous men have been proclaiming the event
of the Lord carrying a load of fire-wood
and hawking it about as a servant of Paanar,
to the distress of his good holy blossomy feet;
is not this event alone sufficient
for a person to pay obeisance out of true love?
255, 256

* * *

If the swaying elephant, the squirrel,
the monkey, the loving spider the ant,
and the long snake performed worship to Civan,
who would not be delighted to undertake
worship (of Civan)?
But slothful you, devoid of all resoluteness,
do not know the love of worshipping His feet.

* * *

If a crane,
hearing with love the glory of our Lord
with the russet-coloured matted locks,
desisted from taking food,
and, controlling its five sense,
engaged in yogic practice
and sought the bliss of mukthi
that it may be freed of all the perfidy of the world,
whom shall I mention as people
who do not seek mukthi? *257 to 261*

* * *

Oh pitiless Mind of mine,
you, on the other hand,
do not think of that bliss even a little while.
Amazing, indeed, is your condition!
I am everyday telling you that our great Lord
is One Who has unto you a love
greater than the love of all who love you. 262, 263

* * *

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But though I prostrate at Your feet
endless crores of times,
you take no pity on me
but wallow (in the mire of the world). *278*

In the next 28 couplets (624 to 651) our Swaamikal goes on to say in detail how this cannot be achieved and exhorts the mind to abandon its past ways of life. And after describing in the next 47 couplets (652 to 698) the qualities of the devotees who have gained this bliss, our Swaamikal comes to the crowning piece of his advice to his mind in the 699th to the 702nd couplets which are:

Who else other than the perfect ones
can know the greatness of the perfect ones?
Be rid of your misery
and, standing in their assembly,
praise them with rejoicing;
find out the acts of humble service
acceptable to their sacred feet,
and perform them ever and ever.
With the grace of God itself as your tongue
chant Lord Civan's elevating mystic five letters;
meditate on them with unceasing love,
contemplating nothing else then the feet
of the Pillar of Red Effulgence
which has the thumbai flower on Its crown.
699 to 702

He concludes the long homily with a benediction.

Leaving the fruitless life called evil
may you ever and ever abide with me.
rejoicing in the life of union with the Lord. *703*

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Purification of the mind, abandonment of all attachments other than to the feet of the Lord, service to devotees, chanting, the mystic five letters, and contemplation of the Godhead is the royal pathway to *mukthi*. This is the message which the Swaamikal offers to us in this decad of 1406 lines.

With a mind won over to his side after this long plea, our Swaamikal can now march confidently on the Illuminative Way. From pleading with his mind our Swaamikal now turns to the Lord and pleads thus:

Oh splendrous Content of the glorious Vedas,
Oh true Brahman
going by the name of Embodiment Gnosis,
Oh transcendent Bliss
sought for by righteous eminent men!
Do enjoin that love to You
may grow in me.

1968.III.4 civa-nesa-venpaa 1

Students of the Thiruvaachakam will recall the lines of the last stanzas of the decad with which Maanikkavaachakar's journey on the Illuminative Way closes. He sings :

You gave Yourself to me,
and me You took in exchange,
Oh Sankara!
Who is the cleverer of us two?
Infinite bliss I gained
what did You gain from me?

Even so, our Swaamikal sings toward the close of his journey on the Illuminative Way:

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There is something to be gained by me
through You;
that You Know:
what is there to be gained by You from me?
If You would please let me know it,
I shall perform it with the greatest eagerness
and be redeemed;
but, Oh my Mother,
I do not know of any such thing here!

1984.III.4 civa-nesa venpaa 17

Students of the Thiruvaachakam will recall to mind a similar plaint by St. Maanikkavaachakar. He bewails thus:

But He bade me, this cur,
to come to His form-pervading Hall
in goodness-abounding Thillai,
and, in His grace, abandoned me here,
while, as the grace-receiving devotees
who came along with Him that day,
each and each merged in Him,
He too, in His grace, coalesced with them.

Thiruvaachakam, decad 2, lines 127 to 131

Our Swaamikal concludes his paean of praise with this plea in the last stanza of the decad.

Oh transcendent Being of Grace,
Oh great Life of Bliss
Who dance on the Hall in Thillai,
Oh Civan Who have taken abode
in the entire lucid minds
of love-filled devotees,
Oh God Who are the embodiment
of true wisdom,
If You take into consideration
even the very least of the misdeeds

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done by this fool of deluded mind,
I will never get out of the darkness-filled sea of birth;
do think of raising me out of that sea.
Oh Lord of bliss !

2470.III.5 mahaadeva maalai 100

The next decad concludes the account of our Swaamikal's journey on the Illuminative Way. It is called "Thiruvarul Muraiyeedu", plea for the Holy Grace. This decad of 232 stanzas may be said to the elaboration of the theme of the last stanza of the previous decad where our Swaamikal petitioned God thus:

Do think of raising me
out of the darkness-filled sea of birth.

Enlarging this plea, our Swaamikal entreats in heart-rending terms thus:

Losing heart with doubt
(whether I will receive Your grace or not),
alas, I am tossed about,
worse than a piece of straw!
Oh my Father, will not Your mind
take pity on me at least now?
What is this injustice!
Have You no cool graciousness
only to me?
Is it that my devilish cruel karma
comes and counsels You so?

2171.III.6 thiruvarul muraiyeedu 1

In stanza after stanza in this long decad the refrain is in the same strain.

On this note of heart-rending cry for the grace of God, our Swaamikal leaves the Illuminative Way

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and steps on the threshold of the Unitive Way. While this happens on the spiritual journey towards the Godhead, the mundane sojourn in Madras ends here and our Swaamikal sets out in his 35th year to Thillai which had been calling him incessantly for over a decade or, perhaps, more.

On his way to Thillai, he visits various celebrated shrines of Lord Civan, such as Pullirukkuveloor, present day Vaitheeswarankoil. Thiruvaaroor, Thirukkannamangai, Pazhamalai, present day Viruddhaachalam, Thiruvathikai Veerattanam, Thiruvannamalai, and arrives at Karunkuzhi, a village about three miles from Vadaloor where he will remain, for the next nine years of his life. He begins this stay at Karunkuzhi most fittingly with six decads of songs addressed to Lord Civan abiding in the form of Lord Ganesan at the outskirts of that village. Our Swaamikal was never a worshipper of petty deities or many gods. The Lord Ganesan he is addressing in these six decads is no other than Lord Civan going under the names of Siddhi Vinaayakar etc. The following lines from the decad of "Homily to his Mind", from which we have given copious extracts earlier, will bear testimony to this. Our Swaamikal sings:

He Who is the Primeval Being
Whom the devas ardently worship
raining flowers at His feet
to the chant of "Hara Hara",
He Who is Ganesan
exhibiting His greatness
in wonderful form
impossible for any devas to view,

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He Who is Ganesan
Who all over the world bestows
all that is desired for
by those Who adore and praise Him,
He Who is Ganesan
Who bestows His grace on us
for all to see,
by removing all the obstacles that faces us
that we may thrive well,
He Who is the Saami, the sea of grace,
Who bestowed on Brahma
Om, the entire content
of the glorious ancient Vedas,
He Who is Ganesan
Who extirpates the stain
of the perfidious malams
and bestows the true path,
putting an end to all disputations,
He is the God
Who, extirpating evil,
and preventing the ruin of the worlds,
added the Ganga on to His russet locks.

1965.III.3 nenjarivurutthal, lines 131 to 137

Bracketing as he does the references to Ganesan and Guhan within the two lines at the beginning and end of the above extract, our Swaamikal leaves us in no doubt about how be looks upon Lord Ganesan and Lord Guhesan. They are nothing but mainfestations of the one and only God, Lord Civan. We may recall to mind that Maanikkavaachakar too addressed Lord Civan as:

"Oh my father Who remove all obstacles".

Our Swaamikal begins his journey on the Unitive Way very befittingly with the invocation of Lord Civan in His manifestation as Lord Ganesan, that aspect of the Godhead which removes all obstacles in the path of the devotee. O

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8. ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE UNITIVE WAY

I have been talking of the Purgative Way, the Illuminative Way and the Unitive Way. I have also explained what they are. In the context of this chapter, I may offer a further explanation which will enable the reader to understand more clearly what these ways are. I said elsewhere that they are ways not in space but in the mind. Being so, another important feature of these ways is that they are not clear-cut ways, each standing by itself. Most of my readers will be familiar with the three gunaas, qualities. They are the Satwic, the Raajasic, and the Thaamasic qualities. We may translate them as the Pure or Harmonious, the Active or Passionate and the Inert or Slothful qualities. It is said that these qualities are never found in anyone as entirely and purely harmonious, or entirely and purely active or entirely and purely slothful. They are usually found mixed, and, depending on the vast predominance of any one of the qualities, a person is characterised as being Satwic or Raajasic or Thaamasic. Similarly, in the case of these three ways as well, a man is said to be travelling on the Purgative Way or the Illuminative Way or the Unitive Way depending on the preponderance of the type of spiritual experiences he is passing through. We will not be far wrong if we call the Purgative Way as the Thaamasic Way, the Illuminative Way as the Raajasic

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Way and the Unitive Way as the Satwic Way. When we say that a person is travelling on the Unitive Way, we must remember that occasionally that person may slip down to the Illuminative Way or even to the Purgative Way. Till the very last moment of eternal union with the Godhead no mystic is ever confident of his worthiness for that crowning act of grace. So he weeps and laments, wails and worries, again and again. He declares again and again his unworthiness for the undeservedly, conferred grace of God. Thus, slipping back and recovering again, our Pilgrim, nevertheless, makes headway on the Unitive Way. We should keep this in mind when we follow in the footsteps of our Swaamikal as he proceeds on the Unitive Way.

In his case, it is a long journey of no less than sixteen years, a journey by Three Books, 197 decads, 3248 stanzas of the Thiru Arutpaa. Our Swaamikal most fittingly, commences the journey with obeisance to the foot of the Lord, to the foot of Lord Nataraajaa of Thillai, the left foot lifted in the pose of the eternal dance which actuates the universe. This is the foot under which he will gain ultimate union with the Godhead in course of time. This is the tool which was placed on his head as an accolade of conferment of mukthi, Bliss everlasting. He sings:

Oh Flame which,
bestowing light on all the orbs of light
in the heavens,

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fills the great etherial space!
Oh Cloud
which produces rain of true gnosis
which yields all produce
without seeds!
Oh great God with an eye on the forehead!
Oh God Who perform the dance of mercy
on the Hall in Thillai!
Oh Lord of the golden proscenium!
Oh Guru of the beautiful cohort
of merciful servitors!
Oh Lord with the lotus-like foot
lifted in dance-pose!
Which is the day
when I will arrive at the land
of grace-filled gnosis,
having crossed the forest
which is the delusion that besets the mind,
the forest where all the cruel beasts,
which are all the imaginable desires,
wander about unceasingly,
and where the soul,
enveloped in utter darkness of ignorance
without a gleam of light anywhere,
is sunk in terrifying darkness?
Do bestow Your grace on this cur
that the day may be this very day.

2572.IV.1 kunchithapaatha-p-pathikam 2

Thus, our Swaamikal steps onto the threshold of the Unitive Way with a prayer to Ammaiappan for conferment of grace to gain his goal, admission to the galaxy of devotees, which is the external sign of the internal dwelling of God within him.

We may recall to mind the prayer of Mannikkavaachakar on a similar occasion. He sang:

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The Mistress dwells in You,
within the Mistress You dwell;
Oh our Primal Lord, Whose being knows no end,
if in the core of Your servant both of You really dwell,
come forward and bestow on me,
Your servant,
the grace amidst Your servants to dwell
that my heart's purpose may be fulfilled.

Thiruvaachakam. 21.1

Having thus once again reiterated his position, our Swaamikal makes his first obeisance to Lord Nataraajaa in the temple at Thillai which is now called Chidambaram. Thillai was the original name of this place. The name arose out of the fact that the city was situated in an area abounding in a plant called Thillai which grows as shrubs. Maanikkavaachakar of the 3rd century A.C., refers to Thillai as Thillai-moothoor, the ancient Thillai. The name of the temple therein is Chit-ambaram. Chit means knowledge gnosis. Ambaram means atmosphere, sky, ether. We may translate Chidambaram as Firmament of Gnosis. The temple in Chidambaram has been in existence since prehistoric times. Whereas all other temples in Tamilnaadu are referred to as the temple at a particular place such as the temple at Madurai, the Temple at Raameswaram, the Temple at Pazhani, the Temple at Kaanchipuram, the Temple at Thillai is merely called 'Kovil', The Temple. Such is the fame and glory of this temple.

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Singing Murugan of Kandakottam

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Lamp burns with water

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No Hindu, in my opinion, could have interpreted the worship of God through images in any better manner. The temple at Chidambaram too has its lingam just like other temples, the amorphous representation of Lord Civan. The temple, however, derives its importance from the representation of Lord Civan as the Dancer. This form is called Nataraajar, the Dancer King. This form may be called an idol. But it is an idol with a difference. -V.I.

On the next page there is a picture of Lord Civan as the dancer, Nataraajan. Maanikkavaachakar worshipped God in the temple of his heart, but on occasions when he worshipped Him externally he worshipped Him as the Dancer in the Golden Hall in the temple in Thillai, modern Chidambaram. He does not refer to Him by the name of Nataraajaa but as 'Thillai-k-kootthan' 'Ambalaththul Aadi', 'Ponnambalavan' etc., all referring to Lord Civan as the Cosmic Dancer.

Civan as the Cosmic Dancer is a purely Tamilian concept and images of Civan in the pose of a dancer are found only in temples in Tamilnaadu or in temples built under Tamilian influence in other places.

The Caiva Siddhaanthins interpret the form, as representing the mystic five letters, Na Ma Ci Vaa Ya, the stoola (gross) panchaakshara. Thus, says the Thiru Arutpayan:

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Listen , Oh Sire, to the significance of the dancing pose!
At the sought for holy foot is na,
The adjoining ma is the abdomen,
The shoulder of the extended arm is the ci,
the famed face is vaa,
And see va end in the crown of the head.

* * * *

The grasped drum is the ci,
The flung out sweeping hand is vaa,
The fear-dispelling hand is ya,
If one researches into it,
The fire in the hand of the Lord is na,
Note that below the foot where Muyalakan rests is ma.

In coming to Thillai, in coming to the presence of Nataraajar in the temple, in singing the 4th decad of the Fourth Book, the Ananda Natana-p-pathikam, the "Decad on the Dance of Bliss", our Swaamikal has left God Who becomes and disbecomes and has come to the threshold of the shrine of the Godhead. It is not the Godhead altogether but it is as near to the Godhead as man can reach with the help of form and name. Our Swaamikal reaches the Godhead proper much later. Standing in the presence of Nataraajaa, Raamalinga Swaamikal sings:

Oh Adept in the Dance of Bliss
Who dance in the wonderful Hall of Gnosis
as the vast world rich in food-grains,
as the souls that reside in that world,
as the munificent One
Who, getting rid of the taint
which pervades the souls,
bestow on them an unheard-of grand life,
as the God Who smiled

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that the three cities,
which had become very strongly opposed to Him,
may be burnt,
as the universal Treasure of gnosis,
as the Child wielding the spear,
as the Son with the elephant face,
as the God Who has assumed cruel snakes
as ornaments,
as the Supreme Chief
worshipped by all the gods,
as our transcendent Godhead,
as Supreme Religion,
as the cosmic sound - the Om,
as the Supreme privilege of Mukthi,
as delicious pure Experience,
as very form of Well-being,
and fill everywhere as Effulgence!

2610,IV.4, aananda natana pathikam 10

In the ten stanzas of this decad Raamalinga Swaamikal has attempted to describe what is indescribable, to define in words what is ineffable. With this paean of praise of Nataraajar, our Swaamikal steps on the threshold of the Unitive Way. We see in this song the seed of our Swaamikal's ultimate concept of the Godhead as the Effulgence, it is the everywhere-pervading Effulgence that is the very form of Mangalam, well-being. 'Mangalam' is an untranslatable world. 'Well-being' is the nearest word I can think of in English. It means "welfare, health, happiness and prosperity" according to "Advanced Learners' dictionary of "Current English". That is what God is - all the world, the very embodiment of well-being. It would not be far wrong to say

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that the rest of the Fourth Book, 37 decads, are cast in bride and bridegroom relationship. This is as it should be. For our Swaamikal is now on the threshold of the Unitive Way.

In this Fourth Book, in these thirteen decads which we are considering at present, our Swaamikal reiterates his loyalty again and again and puts the blame squarely on the Lord. In the same manner, he reminds the Lord that He had already taken him as His slave and that it is not proper to discard him now. He sings:

Saying; "Ha! come!",
You should enslave me,
Oh Lord Who had already enslaved me!
What will I do
if You think in Your mind
about my misdeeds?
There is no one else to call me, saying,
"Come! Welcome!"
Even by forgetfulness
I will not speak with my tongue
the names of petty gods!

2693.IV.11 kali vinnappam 9

Here is another poem where the blame is placed squarely on the Lord.

Would it be wrong
if You bestow Your grace on this cur
that all my taint of ignorance may be eradicated,
on this cur, Who,
deeming You alone as friend, kin,
as the Lord Who stands before me
and bestows grace on me,

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as mother and father,
keep chanting the illumining grand mystic five letters?

2753.IV.15 thani-t-thiruviruttham 25

We see less of self-accusation and more and more of praying to the Lord not to forsake. Thus our Swaamikal sings:

I have learnt that You are
my mother and father,
my true Guru,
and the God Who inquires (into each person's karma);
Oh transcendent Being
Who ride the prancing bull that is Vishnu,
have You, indeed decided to forsake me?

2757,IV.15 thani-t-thiruviruttham 39

The next three decads lead on to a remarkable definition of the transcendent Being that is Civan. The song reproduced below is a prelude to that definition. Our bride sings:

I rejoiced on seeing
the unique Medicine of mercy
abiding in the Common Hall in Thillai ---
the Medicine which,
those who have gained freedom from delusion say,
hid itself in the region
transcending the three states of
wakefulness, dreaming and deep sleep
when sacred Vishnu and Brahma
searched for it
But, alas, It transcends form and formlessness.
It is of the form of great bliss,

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It is endowed with good grace,
It bestows good here on earth
and in the here-after,
It is omnipotent,
the name is Nataraasan,
Oh my mother!

2800.IV.20 thirumaruntharul nilai 2

There can be no better definition of the indefinable Brahman than these songs of our Swaamikal. It is this transcendent Brahman that our Swaamikal worships and woos in the next 14 decads of the Fourth Book in the most intimate relationship of Bride and Bridegroom. Befitting the mood, the songs go with a lilt of happiness difficult to import into an English translation. In great ecstasy the bride bursts into exulting songs which she addresses to her maids-in-waiting:

In the Hall of Gnosis He dances,
Oh my companions!
Witnessing the dance,
I fell in love with Him,
Oh my companions!

Of the dancing rosy feet,
Oh my companions,
I became desirous and pine here,
Oh my companions!

On Him Who dances in the Hall
as embodiment of bliss,
Oh my companions,
I placed my desire,
Oh my companions!

2820, 2821, 2822.IV.26 paangimaar kanni 1,2,3

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With the Fifth Book our Swaamikal concludes his pause on the threshold of the Unitive Way and, in the Sixth Book, enters into the Unitive Way proper. We are concerned here with eight out of the twelve decads of the Fifth Book. They are called the Garland of Love, the Garland of Shining Grace, the Garland of the Consecrated Offering, the Garland of Bliss, the Garland of Bhakthi, the Garland of Beauty, the Garland of Wonders, and the Garland of Forgiveness of Transgressions respectively. These titles themselves supply us a clue to the contents of the decads and their place in the spiritual journey of our Swaamikal towards the Godhead. The first seven decads are songs of ecstatic joy. He sings:

Ha! this is a marvel! this is a marvel!
What shall I say about it!
You made me rejoice,
making this mean fellow
ignorant of gnosis learn gnosis
by showing me,
Oh Gem with the matted locks,
on which the moon shines,
Your feet and crown as well,
showing me this
and showing me that,
revealing to me my state as well,
showing me the special guile
of the self-complacent miracle-mongers,
showing me the state of deathlessness,
showing me Your natural state,
and the place where the mind,
which resembles the rushing wind,
melts away,
Who has got the magnanimity of Your grace!

3038. V. 1. anbu maalai 10

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Already our Swaamikal has begun to experience the early fruits of the union with the Godhead. He describes one of them in 100 stanzas of the second decad of the Fifth Book. All the stanzas describe in growing amazement only one item of experience. Lord Civan walked on His holy rosy delicate feet all the way and, seeking the door of the house where our Swaamikal was staying, opened the door, hailed him and placed in his hands something accompanied by loving and reassuring words. While all the 100 stanzas describe the same incident, the description of the feet and the expressions of amazement and gratefulness vary from stanza to stanza. Nowhere, however, in any of the one hundred stanzas is there any clue to show us what was the object which the Lord placed in our Swaamikal's hands. One thing is clear, it was not a flower. That was given later on; the 1st stanza of the next decad relates this. It also adds that the Lord said, in reply to a request for the sacred ash, that he had given it already on a former day. Therefore, what he gave on this occasion must have been the ash. Whatever it was, the incident made such a great impact on the mind of our Swaamikal that he sang no less than one hundred stanzas to record that incident. Relating this remarkable experience he sings:

On that day in the past,
You came in the middle of the night
and, opening the ornamental door (of my house),
placed Your gracious blossomy feet firmly

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partly outside on the door-step
and partly inside,
and, sending for me, said:
"Oh son, do not grieve;
here, receive this".
And, though this mean fellow refused,
You disregarded it,
and forcibly placed a thing in my hand,
and saying; "Stay here",
You disappeared,
Today, that thing, indeed,
is most helpful for my experiencing You,
What kind of a thavam,
did this cur perform!
I have no longer any misery!

3066. V.2 arut-prakaasa maalai 7

When did this incident happen? In one stanza, the 5th, the Lord accompanies the gift with these words; "Remain here among your relatives". Our Swaamikal sang this decad when he was at Karunkuzhi. He had no relatives there. His relatives, his mother, brothers, sisters, all were at Madras. This incident, therefore, happened, possibly, in Madras either when he was debating whether to go to Thillai or continue at Thiruvotriyoor, or more probably, when he ran away with a friend to become a sannyaasin; in that case why did not the Swaamikal relate it in any of the decads, we have quoted in the earlier chapters. Evidently, our Swaamikal did not realise the greatness of the coming of the Lord or of His gift at that time. He realised it only much later when he was on the threshold of the Unitive Way, when he had left the

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Illuminative Way. In fact, this realisation is the culminant climax of the Illuminative Way.

Maanikkavaachakar too was ignorant (for a time) of a rare and great boon bestowed on Him. He sings:

Oh partner of the goodly Dame
with collyrium-glittering eyes!
After You had come and taken me into Your service,
other than as a glittering gold cup
in the hands of a lisping child,
as rare I did not consider You,

The next decad has a link with the foregoing one but it, probably, differs in the time of the occurrence of the incident related therein.

Oh Gem of a guru
Who, taking a gross form,
perform a gracious dance on the beautiful Hall!
Oh Hill of noble qualities,
Who enslaved me on a former day!
You took a holy form
and, departing (from the heavens),
arrived before this mean fellow,
opened the bag of the sacred ash
and bestowed on me
the red radiant flower;
whereupon, I assuming a posture of humility,
went before you, bowed to You,
received it, and, addressing You, said:
"Oh Treasure of compassion Who redeem me,
please give me the sacred ash as well",
Whereupon, You embraced me and graciously said:
"That day (in the past) we gave you the sacred ash;
today we have given you this".

3160.V.3 pirasaatha maalai 1

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Our Swaamikal may not have known God's intention in conferring on him the gift of the red radiant flower, the Cenchudar-p-poo. But the Lord knew what he was about as will be seen from the very first stanzas of the next decad. Maanikkavaachakar was also the recipient of a red, radiant thing. He calls it Cenchudar. The absence of the syllable 'poo' need not deter us from coming to the conclusion that what was bestowed on Raamalinga Swaamikal and on Maanikkavaachakar was one and the same thing. While Raamalinga Swaamikal does not know what was the intention of God in bestowing the red radiant flower, Maanikkavaachakar is quite clear it and gives expression to it in the following song:

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none else than Civan)
singing how, on the transcendent Effulgence
Who, saving me from the hoax of birth
that I may not sink
into the devious ways of the no-account
devaas,
enslaved me
bestowing on us the unprecedented red spark,
our I-ness perished
and we became Civan Himself!

Thiruvaachakam, 11.4

But, Raamalinga Swaamikal's ignorance of the intention of the Lord was no deterrent to his being freed from misery, to his gaining a great boon, and to his reaching a great state of grace which, with the help of Maanikkavaachakar's poem, we can interpret as becoming Civan Himself.

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Our Swaamikal is filled with joy at the memory of the unparalleled grace bestowed on him and he sings the Garland of Bliss. A special feature of this decad is that every stanza has a homage to the Mother, Civan-Kaama-valli, as well. He sings:

With the golden anklet tinkling,
on the sacred feet,
which the goddess of wealth
gently massages,
She comes walking
and, entering my mind,
She stands therein along with You;
She is the virtuous One
Who sits atop the Vedas
which, free of all doubts,
stand supreme (in the world)
Civa-kaama-valli,
the great Goddess,
Oh my Master,
Who, gladdening Her heart,
dance on the Hall of Gems
while the two
of matchless true love unto You
look on and rejoice!
I, mean fellow,
freed from misery,
gained a great boon,
and sing of You alone;
I have reached a great state of grace!

3170.V.4 aananda maalai 1

There are three statements of great import. For the first time in his life, our Swaamikal declares that he is freed from misery. Secondly, he states that he has received a great boon. Thirdly, he declares that

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he has reached a great state of grace. These statements cannot but refer to his entry on the Unitive Way and his gaining the first, though tantalising, experience of the apprehension of the Godhead. In the course of writing this book, I have been assailed frequently with bouts of doubts as to whether the path which I surmise as having been trod by Raamalinga Swaamikal is merely a product of my delusion. In the veritable forest of songs, it has not been an easy task to see the burgeoning bud, the developing flower, the full-bloom blossom, the tiny growth of a fruit not larger than a poppy seed or a mustard seed, the developing fruit with all its rawness only too obvious to everyone, the flush of the signs of ripening on the fruit. I have struggled with my doubts valiantly and I am rewarded with this song which has proved to me by its three important utterances that I have been correct all along. The Swaamikal was freed from misery, he gained a great boon, and he reached a great state of grace. I may be pardoned if I feel a justifiable sense of exultation at the vindication of the correctness of my line of approach to this subject. My belief is confirmed by other phrases in the rest of the stanzas of this decad. He sings:

"I have reached maturity"
"I have left all my grief behind"
"I am experiencing the state of bliss
which Your devotees gain".

In the next decad, the Garland of Bhakthi, our Swaamikal reaffirms his loyalty, devotion, to the

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Lord. Ooran Atikal says in his remarkable edition of the Thiru Arutpaa that manuscripts in the handwriting of the Swaamikal himself are available even today for all the decads of the Fifth Book, except for the 11th decad. Listing the specialities about the Fifth Book, he says:

"All the 12 decads in this book are "garlands"
All the twelve are in the same order
as originally written by the Swaamikal.
Manuscripts for 11 out of the 12 decads are
available in the Swaamikal's own handwriting.
The titles for (the first) eight out of
the twelve decads are the same as given by
the Swaamikal".

We are very fortunate indeed to have the original manuscripts still available from which the above specialities have been gleaned. As a result of these specialities my interpretation gains vast support and leaves me in no doubt about the appropriateness of the lines on which I have planned this book.

Our Swaamikal ends his pause on the threshold of the Unitive Way on a sober note of seeking forgiveness of all his offences in the past.

The Thiru Arutpaa is from beginning to end a record of the love between the love-lorn damsel that is Raamalinga Swaamikal and her Beloved, Lord Civan. Sulking is a very important ingredient of love. It is the prerogative of any damsel in love. Writing on the 'Pleasures of the Sulks', Thiruvalluvar puts these words in the mouth of the love-lorn damsel:

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"Is there a land of the gods (which gives happiness)
equal to indulging in sulks towards those
who blend (with their beloved)
like water with the field?

Thirukkural 1323

Our Bride, Raamalinga Swaamikal, also has indulged in the sulks on many occasions. Now, that the occasion for eternal union with her beloved has come, she regrets her subjecting Him to misery on various occasions and sings:

Ignorant of correct behaviour,
I sulked with Your Grace
and said some (stupid) things,
I, meanest of mean ignorant fellows.
You should graciously forgive
the offensive things said
the fellow of erroneous ways,
Oh virtuous One,
Oh Lord of matted tangled licks
on which You wear a moon!
Oh Lord on the bull!
Oh immaculate One
Who, while people of righteous ways
were on the look out for You,
showed special favour to me
and, on that day itself in the past,
in Your grace, very forcibly enslaved me
and extirpated my karma!
Oh our King Who perform a dance of bliss
on the Common Hall
while the five deities
and the sages stand around
and praise You!

3216.V.8 aparaatha mannippu maalai 1

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This decad is followed by four decads, of homage to the Four Camaya-Kuravars, Fathers of the Faith, Thirugnaanasambandhar, Thirunaavukkarasar, Sundarar and Maanikkavaachakar. Raamalinga Swaamikal is about to place both his feet firmly on the Unitive Way which all the above four Saints trod successfully in the past. In these decads, our Swaamikal seeks the blessings of all of them and their unseen presence to guide him over the perilous, yet most blissful, path which stretches ahead of him, the Path which leads to integration with the Godhead.

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9. THE UNITIVE WAY

(First Stages)

In the 408th couplet of Vinnappa-kali-venpaa the 2nd decad of the Third Book, our Swaamikal bemoaned:

I am getting worn out
with one foot in the river of redemption
and the other in the mire
called unmanageable worldly life.

But with his entry on to the Unitive Way proper, he has lifted his foot from the mire of worldly life and has set both firmly and unretraceably on the highway which is the Unitive Way, the royal road to union with the Godhead. He celebrates this unique occasion with a paean of praise of the transcendent Brahman, Lord Civan. He sings:

Oh Mountain
Who get caught in the grasp called love!
Oh King
Who enter the dwelling called love!
Oh transcendent Being
Who lodge in one's palm!
Oh Sea
which gets incarcerated in the pitcher called love!
Oh Wisdom
that shines in the life called love!
Oh great Light
contained in the atom called love!
Oh transcendent Brahman
Who are the embodiment of love!

3269. VI.I paraciva vanakkam 3

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With this paean of love, our Swaamikal commences his journey on the first lap of the Unitive Way. This is a song of exultation, a song of vindication of the Path followed by our Swaamikal and, for that matter, by the Four-Camaya-Kuravars by all the saints in the Hagiography of Saints of Tamilnaadu by Sekkizhaar, by all other known and unknown Tamil devotees of the Lord. The path is the path of love. It is called anbu-neri in Tamil and bhakthi-maarga in Sanskrit. This manner of apprehension of the Godhead is unique to the Tamil people. Its beginnings can be seen in Paripaadal, a Tamil classic of the 4th century B. C. Its rules of grammar were laid down by the Tholkaappiyam, the first grammar for the Tamil language, a grammar of great antiquity. The Caivaite saints and Vaishnavaite saints followed this path and appropriated the Godhead. The Thevaaram, the Thiruvaachakam, the Thirumanthiram and other Thirumurais, the Divya-p-prabandham, all these form the literature for that path. For God is Love and he can be gained by love alone. The Thirumanthiram, an ancient Tamil work on the Philosophy of Religion, says:

The ignorant say
that Love and Civan are two different things,
no one knows love itself turning into Civan;
after coming to know
how love itself turns into Civan,
through their love they will turn into Civan Himself.

Yes, devotees will, through their love, turn into Civan Himself. Mannikkavaachakar sings:

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Let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none else than Civan)
singing how, on the transcendent Effulgence
Who, saving me from the hoax of birth
that I may not sink
into the devious ways of the no-account devas,
enslaved me
bestowing on us the unprecedented red spark,
our I-ness perished
and we became Civan Himself.

Thiruvaachakam 11.4

Seekkizhaar, the Hagiographer of the Saints of Tamilnaadu records that Lord Civan Himself said on one occasion about His devotees that

'by devotion they appropriate Me'.

Thus, by all accounts, Lord Civan is Love incarnate and He is appropriated by Love.

Maanikkavaachakar's experiences on his journey to the Godhead helps us to appreciate our Swaamikal's journey far better than anything I can write. Maanikkavachakar sings in the 34th decad of the Thiruvaachakkam thus:

Oh you who are destitute of any hold
Oh you who are on the road to ruin!
If you would be free of attachments,
and, taking hold of that Hold
which has to be taken hold of,
would reach the goal that spells good,
come rushing up and join those
who, learning of the glory
of the Lord of Thirupperunthurai

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He with the matted hair
decked with honey-laden flowers
cherish His anklet-girt feet (in their hearts).

Pilgrims on the Pathway to God, it does not matter at what stage of the journey they are, are ever conscious of their unworthiness. This sense of unworthiness grows in proportion to the in-flow of the grace of God. In such circumstances, Maanikkavaachakar sings:

That You, indeed, are the Lord
of the four-fold Vedas I realise,
and I, the lowliest of all, a very cur,
this too I see.....

Similarly, our Swaamikal who has been singing of the inexhaustible qualities of God in the last decad is so awestruck by the sense of the immense greatness of God that he is, by contrast, overwhelmed by the sense of his insignificance and unworthiness in presence of such ineffable greatness. The next several decads are sung in this frame of mind. He sings:

I am baser than the basest in righteous conduct
who commit murder with weapons
on the battle-field,
I have never known feeling the least pity
in distressful circumstances,
I am more afflictive than a boil
which has erupted inside the rhythmically working
nose,
I do not observe the Faith of Civan,
I cling to the falsities of petty faiths
like a cantankerous monkey;

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what can I do to please the Dancer on the proscenium?

3288.VI.3 aatraamai 6

From decad to decad this feeling of unworthiness grows more and more, for our Swaamikal is not seeking any ordinary boon but is seeking the unique gift of unitive knowledge of the Godhead, inseparable integration with the Godhead. No man can ever say that he has earned the right for this crowning act of grace. It is conferred out of the unbounded munificence of God. The next song reproduced below is sung in this frame of mind:

I have not learnt (the way unto You)
in the manner it ought to be learnt,
I do not remain with delight
in the sacred assembly
of men of contemplation
who have gained wisdom
by studying what has to be studied,
I have never stayed established
in a state of contemplation,
but, even better than such a person,
I pass as one in a state of contemplation,
I do not know how to swim across
the great sea of long-standing lust;
am I capable of knowing
how to attach to my head
the sacred feet which perform the divine dance
on the great gem-set Hall of Gnosis?
I am wallowing here
doing deeds to the contrary;
how I will enter that Hall,
to whom I should relate my woes,

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what I should do,
I do not know any of this.

3315. VI.6 muraiyeedu 3

The next three decads called "The Good Fortune of Devotees", "Despondency on Account of Worry for the Soul", and "Extirpation of Desire" respectively, are very much in the same strain as the previous decads. We must, however, remind ourselves that these lamentations are far different from those we came across in the First and Second Books. We have produced in the 6th and 7th chapters of this Book some of the songs in those books which are full of tribulations unrelieved by any ray of hope. The songs with which we are concerned now are not of that type.

The next decad strikes a new note of self-denigration. Our Swaamikal accuses himself of being a gourmand and a glutton. If any confirmation was needed to the interpretation that all this self-denigration and self-accusation was not on behalf of himself but was said in a vicarious spirit on behalf of the people of the world, the songs in the 9th decad will be ample testimony. For in this decad our Swaamikal accuses himself of gourmandise and gluttony whereas, in truth, he was most abstemious in the matter of food. We have quoted several of his songs in this respect. Therefore, the songs which follow can but be taken as vicarious in their character and context. He sings:

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I never paid any heed to the words of wise men
that if a man is seized with desire for food
all the good thavam performed by him
will disappear like tamarind
dissolved in a river;
I never paid obeisance to You,
I set my heart on rice
mixed with spicy and pungent sauce,
what shall I do, Oh my Father!

3354 VI.9 avaa aruthal 2

The Pathway to God trod by Raamalinga Swaamikal bears a great similarity to the one trod by Mannikkavaachakar. An earnest student of both the Thiruvaachakam and the Thiru Arutpaa can never fail to notice this.

Would it be possible, by Your mercy,
for even me, a sinner,
to truly merge with longing
in the ancient Sea of Transcendent Bliss,
along with Your devotees who merge in it,
and be severed from life, body, I and mine,
with none of them excepted?

Realising the futility of his wilfully and mutinously longing for death in disregard of the divine will, Maanikkavaachakar reaches the peak of his spiritual career in the 33rd decad, the Kuzhaittha-patthu, where he surrenders, totally and without reservations, to the divine will. He gives up the last and the most difficult of all desires to give up, the desire to reach the haven of the feet of the Lord. Such renouncers are called 'veedum vendaa viralin vilanginaar', men of the proud distinction of

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not desiring mukthi even. In four soul-stirring songs, songs of the greatest merit in the Thiruvaachakam, Maanikkavaachakar testifies to the truth of the couplet with which Thiruvalluvar concludes the section on asceticism in his Thirukkural which runs thus:

If one would give up desire
which is by nature insatiable,
that would gain one
then and there the eternal state.

Maanakkavaachakar therefore sings:

What is to be desired, You know best;
it is You who grant entirely what is desired,
By Brahma and Vishnu, who desire for You,
You are rare to obtain;
of Your own volition You assumed lordship over me,
therefore, whatever at Your pleasure You graciously do,
the same I seek;
but should there remain in me
any trace of a trait of desiring something
of my own volition,
is not that too Your sweet will?

He goes a step further and sings:

Oh Lord eternal like a hill;
On that very day when You enslaved me,
did You not appropriate my soul,
body and belongings, everything indeed?
Oh Lord with eight shoulders and three eyes!
Can any harm come to me today?
Do You good, or do You ill,
have I mastery over this?

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One more step in the shedding of desires, and he sings:

Me a cur, the basest of curs,
You took a fancy for,
and of Your own accord enslaved me.
Other than leaving in Your hands
this matter of delusive birth,,
is it for me to research into it?
Is mine the authority here?
Thrust me into a body,
or set me under Your anklet-girt feet as You please,
Oh Lord with an eye on the forehead!

He reaches the acme of renunciation of desire and sings:

Oh Lord with an eye on the forehead!
I have to the delight of my eyes
beheld Your anklet-girt feet,
Henceforth, instead of contemplating them
day and night,
to the exclusion of all other thoughts,
shall I, Oh my Father, brood,
on shedding this body on earth,
and on entering the haven of Your feet?
Fine, indeed, is my serfdom to You!

Maanikkavaachakar shed in the last song the very last vestige of desire, and then and there attained the eternal state, the state in which the sense of I and mine has completely ceased to exist in his heart, and God has completely occupied him.

The 3rd Book has only one *vinnappam*, the vinnappa-k-kali-venpaa which is as large, perhaps, as all the *vinnappams* of the first two Books put together. Other editions of the Thiru Aruptaa have

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another decad in the 3rd Book with the title 'vinnappa-p-pathikam'. This has been renamed in Ooram Atikal's edition as 'thiruvaaroor-p-pathikam'. We shall not consider this decad. The 4th and 5th Books have no *vinnappams*. The 6th has three, two of which we shall be examining shortly. The third belongs to the second stage of Journey on the Unitive Way. *Vinnappam* primarily means a petition, a pleading. It may also be taken to mean a submission, i.e., a point of view submitted for consideration. The petitions vary from *vinnappam* to *vinnappam*, being governed by the stage on the Pathway to God at which it is made and also by the mood of the pilgrim at the moment of making the *vinnappam*. A sampling survey of the several *vinnappams* will not be out of place.

I desire the sensual life only,
I do not pay obeisance
to Your sacred fragrant blossomy feet;
how will this base cur gain Your holy mercy
and be redeemed!

142.1.9 irantha vinnappam 2

It is clear that the dominant emotion in all these songs which represent the three *vinnappams* in the First Book is one of a sense of guilt, undeservingness, and despair. The Second Book has no less than eighteen *vinnappams*. It is but proper that it should be so, for did we not see that no less than 74 decads of the 103 decads of the Second Book cover our Swaamikal's journey on the Purgative Way. These eighteen as well as the three

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from the First Book are vinnappams made while the Swaamikal was traversing the Purgative Way. Let us examine the *vinnappams* of the Second Book. We find a unity of thought and mood in the first five of them. Our Swaamikal sings:

You separated from You this lowly fellow
Who does not know any the least thing
unless he is instructed in it (by You);
how am I to know
the way to reunite with You?
Oh Lord Who wear the crescent moon on the head!
Note that my offence
is worthy of being put up with,
if suffering gnaws this forlorn fellow,
alas, does it befit Your grace
to keep looking on without taking pity on me?

573.II.I karunai vinnappam 3

In this song we find a change from the utterly despondent mood of the songs of the *vinnapams* of the First Book. For one thing, our Swaamikal claims that he had been accepted formerly but has been forsaken lately. Thus, he speaks from a more privileged position than before. He does not harp so much on his own faults, foibles, offences, as on the apparent injustice of God forsaking him at present after having accepted him at an earlier period. From this it is evident that our Swaamikal has made certain appreciable progress on the spiritual path.

The next vinnappam too is in the same strain with however, a significant difference. In this decad, our Swaamikal cites various precedents to God's

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unbounden mercy and asks Him whether it will be difficult for Him to show such mercy.

In the next vinnappam our Swaamikal places on record, in the sense of reminding Lord Civan, that he had been punished peremptorily for a particular act of transgression of the code of conduct of a devotee, and, by inference, makes a submission that the Lord should no longer hold that offence against him. He sings:

I, vile wretch,
forgetting the roûtine of chanting
Your name "Neelakantam" in Your presence,
had taken my food,,
and, alas, stood (before You) like iron before gold;
therefore, Oh beautiful Fruit
with the chaplet which outshines lightning,
haven't I been punished by You today at Otri
which shines as foremost in the world
protected as it is by the army
that is the vast ocean?

1050.II.43 pirasaatha vinnappam

Next follow three vinnappams in succession, the 45th, 46th and 47th decads of the Second Book. Self-accusations, Self-denigrations are absent from these songs. On the other hand, our Swaamikal throws himself at the mercy of the Lord. He sings:

"Oh great Gem within my eyes!
"Oh Sugar-cane of grace!
"Oh Fruit which ripens in the core
of the learned mind!
"Oh Bliss uncontainable within myself!"
Though I do not adore You addressing You thus,

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nevertheless I am Your devotee
come down on this earth
in the unbroken lineage of devotees;
this is no delusion,
Your mind Knows this,
therefore, do positively bestow Your grace on me,
Oh king of Otriyoor,
Oh Lamp shining in the Hall in Thillai!

1068.II.45 vazhimozhi vinnappam 2

One is reminded here of the famous maxim in the Thirukkural where Truth is defined. Thiruvalluvar lays down:

A lie too ranks as truth
if it produces unalloyed good.

It is not surprising that our Swaamikal, whose life as an ascetic, was patterned upon the Thirukkural's code of conduct for ascetics, should have adopted the above maxim to govern his conduct in speaking lies. Would that we too, who speak so many lies each day, apply the same criterion to our lies. If we do so all of them will rank verily as truth.

Apart from whatever work
You prescribed for me,
I have never done anything
of my own volition.

* * *

With You providing me here
with various dishes of delightfully tasty food,
I eat them as Your tasty dishes;
of my own free will
I will never seek such food,
I have never sought such food.

* * *

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I have placed no desire on money,

* * *

In this world, I do not know of any the least desire
in my mind
for pleasures of kingly rule
or for other pleasures.

* * *

I have no desire for even gaining mukthi.

3390, 3394, 3395, 3398, 3399 (extracts). VI. 12
pillai-ch-chiru vinnappam 5, 9, 10, 13, 14

I have no desire to die,
I have no desire to be as I am,
I have no desire to be born any more,
I have no desire for shining in this world
with all the world calling me,
"great man, great man",
I have no desire to perform miracles,
I have no desire to renounce the world,
I have not the least desire
to be steeped in misery
and be indolent!

3408. VI. 12 pillai-ch-chiru vinnappam 15

With this long preface of denial of desire of any sort whatsoever, our Swaamikal goes on to state in the next nine stanzas what his desire is. The first fifteen stanzas of this decad form a negative submission while the remaining nine stanzas form the positive petition, vinnappam. He sings:

It is my desire, Oh my Father,
to associate with those
who are eligible for the Sat-sang,
to gain the conduct
befitting that august assembly
and imperishable goodly true mode of life,

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to daily sing and dance (with joy)
about the dance on the Hall of Gnosis
and the dance on the Golden Hall (in Thillai)
and to bring joy to all the creatures
of this visible beautiful world.

3401. VI 12 pillai-ch-chiru vinnappam 16

How far our Swaamikal has travelled up the Pathway to God can be seen as much from the first fifteen stanzas of pillai-ch-chiru vinnappam where he lists the items (which include mukthi too) for which he has no desire as form the last nine stanzas of the same decad which list his desires. All his desires are characterised by concern for the welfare of humanity, and by a longing to relieve its suffering. There is one desire among all these which we should specially note. That is the desire to found the Society of the Universal Pure True Path (to God). This is the first time that such a desire is very explicitly stated. When we consider this desire, we should not fail to take note of the desire expressed in the previous stanza, the desire to renovate the temple at Chidambaram. If we fail to do so, we may fall into the error of thinking that the desire to found the Society of Universal Pure True Path (to God) and to raise a sacred temple pertaining to that society arose in our Swaamikal's mind as the result of a revolt against the temple at Chidambaram. That would not be correct. The Society in the temple (the Gnaana Sabhai at Vadaloor) was conceived in the mind of our Swaamikal as extensions of the temple at Chidambaram, as its subsidiary. The decad in

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which these nine desires are expressed is called ciru vinnappam, minor petition. But in fact, it is a major petition, a petition of vast significance, a petition which all of us should try to live up to. Having made this not-so-minor a petition our Swaamikal goes on to make his major petition, peru vinnappam in the 133 stanzas of the next decad. He sings:

On Chief Who are the unique great Effulgence!
Oh my Father!
Oh God of mellowed great mercy
abiding in the sacred Hall of Gnosis!
Please entertain in Your sacred sweet mind
this petition which this slave of Yours
entertains in his mind
and now, standing before You, expresses in words,
and swiftly bestow grace on me;
I will not be patient any more
for even a little while;
I swear this by Your blossomy twin golden feet!

3410. VI. 13 pillai-p-peru vinnappam 1

In even more stanzas, our Swaamikal addresses God in various eulogistic, endearing, and entreating terms and requests Him to lend ear to his petition. They end with the same request couched in various phrases such as:

this slave is telling You, graciously listen to this,

* * *

this slave is uttering this, graciously listen to this,

* * *

this slave is speaking to You, please listen to this talk,

* * *

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please entertain this in Your ears,

* * *

please retain this in Your mind,

* * *

Oh my Father, hear these words,

Having thus ensured the attention of the Lord, our Swaamikal goes on to state how he is qualified to receive the grace of God. The famous Lord's Prayer in the Holy Bible has this petition:

> *Oh Lord, forgive us our trespasses*
> *even as we forgive the trespasses of others*
> *unto us.*

In the same spirit, our Swaamikal prays for the grace, the compassion, the charity of God, supporting his claim to such grace by a long account of his own compassion to the people of the world.

It is possible that we, common men, may be affected by death or disease, particularly if it is that of someone near and dear to us, but we are not very likely to be very much affected by the poverty of another, even if he happens to be one's own brother. But Swaamikal was not a common man; he was an extraordinary man, I may say he was a unique man with a heart that throbbed with pain at the misery of not only those with whom he was acquainted but of all humanity. Therefore, he sings:

> *Oh transcendent Being*
> *Who graciously dance alone*
> *up above in the unique region of the transcendent*
> *ether!*

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Oh rare great Being!
Does not Your mind know
how my heart trembled and broke
whenever the grey-haired, the young and others,
sufferers in the life they led on this earth
at the hands of the sinner called Distress of Poverty,
treating me as a friend,
related, their respective grievances?

3420. VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-11

Even occasional hunger of people affected our Swaamikal in an abnormal manner. He sings:

Oh my Father of the splendid Hall of Gnosis!
Oh my God! Oh my great Glory!
Does not Your mind know
my mind getting terrified
and quaking with distress
whenever I saw in this glittering world
the hectic wanness from disease or hunger
(on the faces and forms)
of mothers, companions, neighbours,
relatives, friends, and even strangers?

3419. VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-10

Our Swaamikal was not only affected by actual misery of others but even by omens which may portend some calamity or other for others. He sings:

Oh my Father!
Whenever the house-lizards in large numbers
gave their warning to my left or above me,
or in front of me or from other directions,
I, wondering whether they foretell
my hearing news of grief of others,

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suffered in my delicate mind
and flagged in my spirits;
moreover, Oh my Father,
You know that whenever the owl screeched
I suffered like the cow of the cowherd does
on hearing a harsh word.

3432. VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-23

Our Swaamikal was sore distressed at heart not only by death, disease, distress, destitution, dirges of others, and omens relating thereto, but even by such ordinary incidents as the strong oppressing the weak, or the beating of pupils by a teacher. Even petty theft at someone's house affected him very strongly and excited his sympathy and compassion. He sings:

I am not capable of telling exactly
how much my mind was perturbed
when, alas, the strong beat the weak;
Your sacred mind knows it, Oh my father!
You saw that the fear I experienced
on seeing revellers was greater than a sea;
who knows the tremor I experienced
on learning the cruel wrongs
inflicted on the devotees by wicked people?

3464. VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-54

We must be on guard against an impression from these songs that our Swaamikal feared for his own death, illness, misfortune or loss of possessions. Such is not the case. All his trembling, all his worry, mental suffering, agony of mind, were only for the misfortune of others, never for himself!

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Our Swaamikal's compassion did not stop with human beings and their major and minor miseries; it included animals too. He hated the sacrifice of animals in the name of religion. He sings:

Sorely hurt in my mind,
Alas, I trembled in my heart
Seeing goats, pigs, cocks, and sacrificial bulls
being led to be sacrificed
to what are called harassing minor deities
established in our country
under many many names
I was also seized with fear
on seeing the evil temples of minor deities
which are prevalent in this Kaliyuga

3472. VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-63

Our Swaamikal reaches the acme of his compassion when he sets down his feeling for withering crops. Even God, Who is the very embodiment of compassion has not been described in the literatures of the world as being moved by the sufferings of plant life. Tamil literature has only one parallel to place by the side of our Swaamikal's compassion for plant life. Paari, a minor chief of Tamilnaadu, is said to have been so much moved by the agony of the tendril of a jasmine vine that he descended from the chariot he was riding on and left it by the side of the vine as a support for it to cling to and grow. Our Swaamikal sings:

Whenever I saw withering crops
I too withered;
on seeing the empty-handed ones,
worn out with unassuaged hunger

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in spite of begging house to house,
fainting with hunger,
my heart shook like an aspen leaf.
When those who were suffering
from long-drawn chronic disease
happened to come before me
and I saw them, I shuddered;
I wilted on seeing the down-hearted ones
who were men of unmatched self-respect,
poor though they were.

3471.VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-62

To our Swaamikal plants too were living creatures. He was an ascetic, nonpareil. To put it in a few words, our Swaamikal was the embodiment of compassion. He was compassion incarnate. He sings:

Whenever my mind strayed into worldly affairs
due to surging compassion towards living beings,
I got alarmed
and petitioned Your feet,
and even today petition Your feet;
assuredly, my life and my compassion
are one, not two;
if compassion departs (from my heart),
my life too departs;
Oh Unique One in my heart,
I swear this by Your feet!

3506.VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-97

So far, our Swaamikal has been pressing his claim for compassion at God's hands on the ground of his own compassion to all creatures. Only a highly sensitive mind tuned to a very high degree of reception of the waves of distress of others can feel

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such a degree of compassion, as our Swaamikal felt towards man, animal, bird, and even plant. Such a highly tuned mind cannot but be extremely sensitive to harsh and hostile vibrations arising from coarseness of thought, word, and deed of others. In the stanzas that follow, our Swaamikal acquaints God with the very high sensitiveness of his mind.

Our Swaamikal's outpourings are a puzzling admixture of confessions, entreaties, now vicariously on behalf of others, now on behalf of himself. The most puzzling of these outpourings are those regarding lust for women. There are several hundreds of stanzas on this theme, all in the first person, so that anyone unacquainted with the biography of the Swaamikal could well be excused if he took him for a libertine of libertines. Then, what is the truth? The truth is embedded in the stanzas of the decad now under consideration which are reproduced below. They show that all the other songs have been sung in a vicarious manner on behalf of all mankind.

Oh my Father!
You Know also how,
whenever women wilfully came to me,
I trembled in my mind
thinking that if, bewitched by their charms,
I embraced them and delighted in my mind,
harm will come immediately to them who sported with me,
and that it will be harmful to me
to witness the misery of those left behind,
and that I cannot bear to let them suffer that

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misery,
and that the whole thing would be a shameful deed.

3436. VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-27

There was only one occasion in the half century of the life of our Swaamikal when he touched a woman who was not his mother, or, perhaps, sister. This was the bride he married. Of this he sings:

Whether it is vengeful cruel karma
or an act of Your grace,
I do not Know,
While I was free of any infatuation
over any one of several damsels of sorts,
I still felt inclined to touch the hand of one of them
But, apart from touching her
who had bent down (to touch my feet),
I did not enter her.
But thinking of this even now,
I go cold and clammy (with shame)
Whenever I think of it,
my heart breaks,
What more is there to say?
Oh my Father,
You Know.

3452. VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-43

Such was the purity of heart of our Swaamikal that thinking a quarter of a century later of the one and only occasion in his life when he touched the hand of a woman (who was not altogether a stranger to him, being his sister's daughter and his plighted bride) he felt cold and clammy and his heart broke. "What more is there to say"? he asked the Lord. We may echo his words and say. "What more is there to

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say"? about the purity of thought, word and deed of our Swaamikal.

Though the Swaamikal has pegged his claim to the grace of God in no less than three score and one stanzas, not to speak of the first eight which he devoted just to gain the ear of God, he has material, perhaps, for twice as many as sixty-one stanzas, for he sings:

If the tale of the agitation and affliction
which I suffered here in this manner
from the day I gained knowledge
of the nature of the world
to this day
will not diminish by the telling,
no matter men of howsoever much ability may
relate it,
what can I say?
What I have said is enough.
Oh my Chief!
This is the most suitable moment
(to bestow Your grace)
All this is well known to Your sacred mind!

3478. VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-69

After this long preface, our Swaamikal proceeds to make his vinnappam in the next sixty stanzas. His vinnappam proper is made only in the three stanzas of the decad, the 131st, 132nd and the 133rd. Two stanzas preceding these three are in the nature of preface to the vinnappam proper, threats to end his life if his petition is not granted. The 55 stanzas which precede these are declaration of his loyalty. He sings:

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I came here to You to gain relief
from all the weariness of mind
which I experienced from despicable fear and misery,
but what is this?
Maayai and the rest also have come along with me.
Alas, Oh munificent One,
Oh principal Being of my life,
Oh my King,
I do not know any one but You,
there is none else I can think of;
my body, possessions and life are yours only, not mine

3482. VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-73

After having asserted his unswerving devotion and service and his innocence of any offensive act, our Swaamikal proceeds to ask God whether it does befit Him to harbour in His mind any offence committed by him and whether it is fair and fitting that His son should suffer all this misery. Stanzas 81 to 90, some of which we shall see presently, will remind us of the agony of Jesus at Gethsemane in the Mount of Olives. He sings:

Oh munificent One Who have on one side of You
my Mother of collyrium-laden eyes!
I have never respected
even those who abuse You out of love,
I praise those who praise You
and realise that they are people
who have been redeemed;
apart from this, I have done no other thing
to the knowledge of Your grace;

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and even if I had done so,
is it fair to harbour it in Your sacred mind?

3489. VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-80

Oh Cause (of all the Universe)
Even though I know the glorious way
in which Your holy and graciously righteous rule
is resplendently exercised with immeasurable delight
over all the domain spoken of by the Vedas
and by the numbers Aagamas
while Vishnu and others stand by
paying obeisance to You,
is it fair that Your son
should languish here in this world
through this misery and the like?

3490. VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-81

The disclaimer of any responsibility for offences committed as a result of Karma and for offences committed by the mind shows how high our Swaamikal has ascended on the Path to the Godhead and how far he has detached himself from all his five sense-organs and their doings as well as from his mind. He has reached the Jeevan-muktha state where Karma no longer begets Karma, where he has freed himself of all bonds which lead to rebirth. Hindu theologians go so far as to say that if a Jeevan-muktha commits even a murder he is not reponsible for it and it does not bring in its train karmic consequences as it will do in the case of an ordinary mortal.

In the next ten stanzas our Swaamikal proceeds to assert his unswerving faith and devotion. In some

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of them he refers most poignantly to his former state of grace and his present fall from grace of the Lord. In one of them there occurs the first ever reference to a phonic esoteric experience which was most graciously vouchsafed by God. Other mystics too have had similar experiences and have placed it on record. Maanikkavaachakar is one of them. These stanzas are very significant stanzas in our Swaamikal's heart-rending plea for grace. He sings:

Meditating on You alone
as Mother, as my Father,
and as the Ambrosia of the Hall of Gnosis,
And doing Your work in this world.
I am striving in my mind
to make Your mercy abide permanently in me.
Your sacred mind knows the delicacy of my mind,
the frailty of my body wherein it resides,
and the way I exist (here on earth)

3524, VI pillaipperu vinnappam 13-115

This decad, pillai-p-peru vinnappam, the Decad of the Son's Major Petition is, as been said before, a crucial one in the record of our Swaamikal's journey on the Pathway to God.

Your sacred mind knows how I abide here
thinking that this is the moment,
the precise moment
for the arrival
of my beautiful Spouse of mercy,
the great Gem of a pupil in my eye,
the Ambrosia which has blended with my mind,
the preventive Medicine against delusive ways,
the all-powerful munificent One,
the meaningful Bliss

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eternally abiding in the Hall of Gnosis,
the Merit (earned by me in the past)
Who has now enslaved me
and has bestowed grace on me.

3532, VI pillaipperu vinnappam 13-123

It is very fitting that our Swaamikal should pray for compassion - the one quality of his on the strength of which he has made this petition. This is the core of his major vinnappam. It is repeated in the next stanzas also. He sings:

Oh Gem resplendent in the eternal Golden Hall!
Oh munificent One!
Oh Life in the Hall of Gnosis!
It is Your duty to save my life;
therefore, You should graciously accept
the petition made by Your slave,
and, getting rid of the fear
that haunts my mind
which is engaged in contemplation of You,
and the mishaps and calamities that beset me,
You should bestow on me
the ambrosia of Your grace
and fulfil my aspirations
and make me Your slave.

3541. VI. pillaipperu vinnappam 13-132

The decad ends with a tearful entreaty:

Alas, I am unable to bear this fear,
mishaps and cruel misery;
graciously get rid of their grip on me,
Oh eminent One of the Golden Hall
Who, getting rid of the tormenting misery (of devotees),
enslave them;

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Oh Partner of the Dame
with eyes streaked with mercy,
Oh munificent One,
Oh Life in the Hall of Gnosis!

3542. VI pillaipperu vinnappam 13-133

Thus ends the major petition, the grand petition crowning the numbers of petitions of varying types which are scattered through the previous Books of the Thiru Arutpaa and of which we have made a preliminary survey before trying to analyse and interpret this great petition. This petition, it will be quite clear now, is totally different from all the foregoing petitions.

I have been repeating again and again throughout this book that a mystic keeps reverting to his unworthiness, his misery, his despondency, because however much he may have actually advanced on the spiritual path, he is ever and ever acutely, poignantly conscious of his unworthiness and, therefore, gets, plunged in despair and despondency.

The next four decads, the 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th of Book VI are sung in a spirit of surrender, in a spirit of seeking refuge with God. Their very names, their refrains, are redolent of this spirit. The decads are called abhaya-t-thiran (Decad on Refuge), aatra maattaamai (Inability to Endure), vaathanani-k-kazhivu (Plethora of Misery), abhayam ituthal (Seeking Refuge). The refrain of the first of this series of four decads is "I have placed faith in You,

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do not forsake me". This decad is a natural sequel to the former one where our Swaamikal bitterly complained about God having entrusted him to a callous foster-mother. He sings:

Oh Hill of refined gold set with gems!
Oh Being Who graciously enslaved me!
Oh Exposition (of Reality)
Who raise one to the Home of Deliverance!
Oh Wonder of a Light
that dwells in the Reality so expounded!
Oh my Spouse
Who got rid of all the misery
of this heart-weary youngster!
I have placed faith in You,
do not forsake me!

3553. VI. 15, abhaya-t-thiran 1

In the following stanzas our Swaamikal stresses his loyalty and absolute faith to back for being given Sanctuary, for not being forsaken. He sings:

Even though I am fellow
of a mind filled with mean desires,
even in my dreams
I will not think even the least of changing faith
or of speaking about false codes of conduct
or of worshipping any others (but You);

* * *

I have decided to contemplate You only
in my mind and to adore You only
without closing my eyes night and day
with unmaimed body, unrotted mind.

3555, 3556. VI. 15 abhaya-t-thiran 3,4 (extracts)

We may take into consideration here a song from the 18th decad as well, called "Seeking

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Refuge". In the course of reviewing the decads of the several books for the purpose of writing this book, I have often felt that some decads would be better for being shifted from their present positions to other places. One such is this 18th decad of the Sixth Book. In theme it is similar to the 14th decad and it would follow well after that decad. Our Swaamikal seeks refuge at the feet of the Lord. He cries "abhayam, abhayam", grant me freedom from fear; in other words, grant me refuge. He sings:

Oh Lord with form!
Oh formless Lord!
Oh Light!
Oh Ether!
Give me an unceasing supply
of great grace-abounding ambrosia,
this is the right moment,
this, indeed, is the right moment;
I cannot wait any longer,
I cannot wait even a little longer;
If You will not yet come,
I will not live any more;
Oh my Spouse with a crown
in which the moon has taken refuge,
Oh Lord Who have already taken abode in my mind
as my Guru,
Abhayam! Abhayam!

3611.VI.18 abhayam ituthal 1.

In the 16th decad our Swaamikal declares his inability to endure the misery of separation any longer, the plethora of which he describes in a succeeding decad and seeks refuge at the feet of Lord Nataraajaa in the next decad. He sings:

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Oh my King of Mercy
Who flourish here on earth
as eight manifestations!
Oh Treasure of compassion
Who, (formerly) getting rid of whatever was wrong in me,
waylaid me and enslaved me!
Oh God Whom people of whatever kind praise!
Oh Father! Oh King!
Note that I can no longer endure
(the misery of separation from You)!

3581.VI.16 aatra maattaamai 1

The last six stanzas of this decad, the 17th in the Sixth Book, reveal an incident of great significance in the spiritual career of our Swaamikal. In two of these stanzas, our Swaamikal pleads for the conferment of the Effulgence of Grace and in the next four stanzas he sings of the fulfilment of that desire. He pleads for the conferment of the Effulgence of Grace thus:

Oh Treasure of mercy!
Oh my two eyes!
Oh Light of the Land of Clarity
which, blended with my eyes, shines therein!
Oh Ether!
Oh true Prosperity!
Oh Crown-jewel of my mind!
I cannot bear to remain unwisely
in the world beset with darkness (ignorance);
this is the right moment,
Oh youthful One,
to bestow on me the effulgence of grace
and appear before me!

3605.VI.17 vaathanai-k-kazhivu 15

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We can hear in the above stanza the echo of the second line of the famous Upanishadic Prayer, "tamaso maa jyotir gamaya", "from ignorance lead me to knowledge".

Come, Oh Pupil of my eye!
Give me all that I have in mind;
this is the right moment,
come,
If you delay even a little,
my life will depart;
I have informed You;
I do not speak with two tongues
I have spoken with the one tongue
which sings Your sacred feet!

3606. VI. 17 vaathanai-k-kazhivu 16

The 20th and 21st decads are important landmarks in the first stage of our Swaamikal's journey on the Unitive Way. In these we find positive statements of the apprehension of the Real. He sings:

It is true that I have searched for You,
It is true, that in order to gain clarity of truth,
I have sulked with You a little,
nevertheless, have I ever thought
even the least of anything else?
I do not know of any such thing
to the best of the knowledge of Your dancing foot!
Oh Unique Great Effulgence on the Hall in Thillai,
I will never part from You,
with Whom I have had union;
my tongue shrinks from
even the mention of parting from You!

3631. VI.20 irai-p-poruppu iyambal 1

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In this state of union without a trace of separateness, our Swaamikal sings the praise of Nataraaja his Spouse, and Nataraaja his guru, in the 22nd and 23rd decads. Sri A. .Balakrishna Pillai considers that the first stage of our Swaamikal's journey on the Unitive Way ends with the 21st decad of the sixth Book. He classifies these decads under the title, "Poorva-gnaana Chidambara-p-pakuthi", "Section of the early stage of attainment of gnosis at Chidambaram". I feel however, that this section would be incomplete without the 22nd, 23rd and 24th decads as in Ooran Atikal's edition, the Nataraajapathi Maalai (Garland of Poesy on my spouse. Lord Nataraaja), the Sargurumani Maalai (the Garland of Poesy on the Gem, my True Guru) and Tarbhodha Izhappu (Loss of Consciousness of the self). The first two record various spiritual experiences of great significance and the first stage of the Unitive Way. Our Swaamikal has joyous journey on the first stage of the fruit of the weary but joyous journey on the first stage of the Unitive Way. Our Swaamikal has lost all consciousness of 'I and mine'. He has begun to enjoy the experience of aham brahmaasmi. I am Brahman. He and the Godhead are no longer two, they are one. We may say that our Swaamikal's ministry on earth begins here, a ministry that in terms of decads and stanzas was to last 120 decads and 2099 stanzas. In terms of time we cannot be so precise, but may hazard a guess that it could not have been less than ten years. For the journey on the first stage of the

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Unitive Way could not have, in all probability, taken him more than five years out of the fifteen years he spent in Karunkuzhi and its environs.

Students of comparative study of The Thiruvaachakam and the Thiru Arutpaa will be reminded of the following lines of Maanikkavaachakar:

Like the waves of the rich cool Sea of Milk
and like the waters in midsea
on full-moon day,
filling the core of my mind to overflowing,
and beggaring all description,
ambrosia to collect in each hair root of my body
He ordained.
Within this cur's frame,
through every fibre of this wretch's carnal body,
injecting sweet honey with the aid of a kurumbu
He pumped streams filled with marvellous
ambrosia
right to the cavities of the bones.
And, as if with my melting heart
He fashioned a new form,
an ecstasy-bubbling body He created for me.
.....
Thus, when in me, Mercy's pure honey He mixed,
in His Grace, He made even me, of lowliest rank,
surpassing ambrosia sweet.

Thiruvaachakam, 3rd decad, Thiruvandappapakuthi,
Lines 168 to 177

Having adored the Godhead as God Within, our Swaamikal proceeds to adore Him as God Without. In Hindu theology, God is conceived as present in eight forms, ashta-moorthams. They are earth,

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water, fire, wind, ether, the sun, the moon and Iyamaanam, the Purusha, or the actuating Dynamic Force. Our Swaamikal devotes seven stanzas in this decad to those aspects of God except the Dynamic Force. He, probably, felt that a stanza for this aspect was not necessary as this aspect was inherent in the seven stanzas devoted to the other manifestations. He sings:

Oh Being
Who fill the earth in its bottom and top,
in its vast surface and in its breadth,
in its entirety, in all its contours,
and, filling them, give them shape,
and becoming each and everyone of them,
yet become a true state
which is not each and everyone of them!

Oh Light
Who are present in water,
in the reservoirs filled by that water,
in their state of plenitude,
in the essence of the water,
in its flow,
in the shimmer of the flow,
in the shade (of the trees overhanging the water),
in its ripples,
in its quality,
in its sources,
in the salt of the water,
in the nice taste inherent in the salt,
in the waves,
in the said water's bottom, top and middle,
and give it its nature.....
.....!

3656 VI.22. nataraasapathimaalai 6 (extracts)

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The last four stanzas of this decad end with an unusual refrain, a significant address to Lord Nataraaja. The refrain is this:

Oh great Being Who are established
in the etherial thureeya space!

Moreover, Nataraaja, who was addressed so far as Pathi (Spouse), is now being addressed as Guru, a sort of a transition to the theme of the next decad, which is "The Garland of Poesy on the Gem that is the True Guru". These endings are conclusive evidence to show that our Swaamikal has gained Apprehension of the Real, intermittent though it may be, yet true apprehension. This stage of apprehension is called savikalpa-samaadhi, a state of union with the Godhead of an intermittent character. Our Swaamikal has become a Jeevan-muktha, a devotee who has gained release from death and birth while even living in a body in this present birth, which is, however, the last. Established in this remarkable state, our Swaamikal sings a Te Deum in four stanzas. One of these has already been reproduced in the preceding page.

"Oh Joy rare to be gained by those who argue", "This boon can be gained there, nay, this boon can be gained here". Our Swaamikal, evidently, had in mind the people, who misguided by self styled religious teacher, make vows now to Murukan at Pazhani, now to Venkataachalapathi at Thiruppathi, to Krishnan at Guruvaayoor, to X or Y or Z at various shrines as if setting up the gods in competi-

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tion and driving a bargain with them. Vows profit no one except the priests and the Temple Trusts. Let us say, "Oh God, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven", and abide by God's will.

We saw in the last decad Nataraaja adored as the Guru in its last four stanzas. This is continued in the next decad also, which is cast in the spirit of thanks giving to Lord Nataraaja for all the grace received so far. It is more than a Te Deum. It details several special acts of grace of God, all of very great significance. We would benefit by seeing as many stanzas of this decad as possible. He sings:

Oh rosy pure Gold
Who have never known any test for its quality!
Oh Ruby!
Oh colourful Tongue of a flame!
Oh great Hill of noble qualities
Who abide in the minds
of men of great thavam
whom the god of death does not know!
Oh Fruit in the hall of Gnosis
Who make no discrimination
(of caste, race, country or language)!
Oh Guest Whom adepts in knowledge praise!
You have taken delight
in these offerings of mine
who does not know to offer them!
Oh unique Nataraaja!
Oh Gem of a true Guru of mine!

3685. VI.23 sargurumani maalai 1

Let us conclude this interpretation of the Sargurumani Maalai with two more stanzas of

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significance and proceed to the last of the decads in this section of our Swaamikal's journey on the Unitive Way. He sings in these stanzas a paean of praise, a potri, which, I understand, is called acathist in Russian which is one of the many forms of the liturgical hymnody of the Orthodox Church and whose characteristic is praise. Our Swaamikal sings:

Oh Fruit of the karpaka tree
(the wish-fulfilling tree)
Who, blending with the minds
of those who have transcended
all illusory thinking,
taste sweet therein!
Oh Ambrosia
Who, after enslaving me,
bestowed wisdom on me,
and graciously set me
in an unperishing state of grace!
Oh true Spouse
Who to the amazement of several worlds
set the imprint of Your blossom feet
on the crown of even me!
Oh transcendent, transcendentally transcendent
Treasure of Chidambaram!
Oh unique Nataraaja my Gem of a Guru!

* * *

Oh State unreachable
to even the Vedas
which adore You saying:
"Oh One, Oh Many!"
Oh Mountain reached by me!
Oh true transcendent Being
Who told me:
"Change all the vociferous religions into one"!
Oh God

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Whose nature is
to bestow the great treasure (of mukthi)
on those who have amazing love (unto You),
and make them enjoy bliss!
Oh King
Who, bestowing on me the boon of deathlessness,
protect me,
Oh unique Nataraaja, my Gem of a Guru!

3705, 3709.VI.23 sargurumani maalai 21, 25

As a logical sequence of this great boon of the great effulgence of grace, our Swaamikal loses consciousness of his self, consciousness of himself as a separate entity apart from God. He has gained the state where, in the words of Ṭhomas Merton, it is "God living within God, and identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but God living in God". In this unique state of being, our Swaamikal sings:

Even those who had matured
(in spiritual life)
in that manner
did not know the least (about the Godhead),
but I learnt a little by Your grace, my Guru!
I had thought to remain unknown to any one
after having had a vision
of the unique form
ripened (in my mind) in the best manner,
I do not know whether
it is God's natural act of grace
or it is the act of the great maayai (ignorance)
of that noted colour (black)
that I,
who had decided to remain incognito in this
manner,

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was dragged into the street
for all to know me,
Oh dancing King of the proscenium,
behold, my mind is pacing the hall
(in great perturbation)

3710. VI.24 tharbodham -zhatthal 1

The Son of man has become the Son of God, and he who was unknown and who did not want to be known was dragged much against his will to discharge his pre-ordained mission on earth, to commence his ministry on earth, in order to establish the Pure Universal True Path to God, a path, a religion, based on compassion towards all creatures on earth, a religion based on intense and one-pointed love of God, a religion freed from the stifling influences, curses, I would say of caste, country, race, language conflicting creeds, petty cruel gods and inhuman sacrifices, freed from the dialectics of learned scriptures.

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10. THE UNITIVE WAY

(Second Stage)

Our Swaamikal steps on the second stage of his journey on the Unitive Way with a vinnappam, a petition, the last of the petitions in the Thiru Arutpaa. We cannot say precisely how long he travelled on this stage of the Unitive Way; may be four years, the years he spent at Vadaloor after leaving Karunkuzhi where he had stayed nine years since his arrival from Madras. We can say, however, with precision how many decads and stanzas of the Thiru Arutpaa cover our Swaamikal's journey and experiences on this second stage of his journey on the Unitive Way. After relating in 56 decads and 895 stanzas his experiences, our Swaamikal pours forth in one decad of 1596 lines a veritable fanfare of words on the crowning experiences of this stage where, in the words of Thomas Merton "one does not have an experience but becomes experience itself." This decad of 1596 lines sums up all the experiences of the foregoing 56 decads. I wish I could say that there is no element of doubt, despondency, denigration of oneself in the decads we are now taking up for consideration. A faint trace of such moods occurs in just one decad, a trace so faint that one may ignore it altogether in assessing the quality of the experiences in this stage of the journey on the Pathway to God, in these 56 decads. In an article called "An Introduction to the Thiruvaachakam",

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I wrote thus about certain decads of the Thiruvaachakam:

> "While the 150 stanzas of the 5th and 6th pathikams (decads), the Thiruchchatakam and the Neethal Vinnappam, abound with terms of self depreciation, self-accusation, terms of despair and despondency, pleading and entreaty, the 243 stanzas of pathikams (decads) 7 to 22, from the Thiruvempaavai to Koil-thiruppathikam, are singularly free from any such terms. On the other hand, the stanzas rise from subdued elation to joy, from joy to ecstasy, and from ecstasy to all-surpassing bliss and end on a note of exultant achievement in stanza 397, the last in the 22nd decad, the Koyil-thiruppathikam".

This description will fit on all fours the 56 plus decads which cover the experiences of the second stage of our Swaamikal's journey on the Unitive Way.

This is the vinnappam which our Swaamikal made before God when he set out on this stage of his journey. He sings:

Oh munificent One
Who dance on the Golden Hall set with gems!
Oh Lord Who taste sweet
in the minds of Your devotees
like the heavenly flavour of a ripe banana!
You should graciously receive in Your sacred ears
the petition of this poor cur;
it is that I should assume

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In this wretched human birth of mine
the form of a guru (to preach) Your grace.

3720. VI.25 thiru-mun-vinnappam 1

This is only the first item in the petition. Nine more items are petitioned for in the next nine stanzas of this Decad.

If the reader will recall to mind all the previous vinnappams in the Thiru Arutpaa which were exhaustively analysed in the foregoing chapter, he will note the remarkable difference between this vinnappam and all the former ones. This vinnappam lays the foundation for the saakaa-p-peru-vaazhvu, the undying life of which we will hear more as we go along with our Swaamikal on his journey on the Unitive Way.

We may call this section of the journey of our Swaamikal on the Unitive Way as the Section of the Apprehension of The Great Effulgence of Grace which is our Swaamikal's term for the Godhead which is the "immanent and transcendent Ground of all being", "the divine reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds". The Arut-perum-jothi-akaval is an attempt to define in words what cannot be contained in words, to define the Godhead. If anyone can be said to have succeeded in describing the indescribable, our Swaamikal may well be said to have so succeeded in his great Akaval. As a corollary to this concept of this part of the journey on the Unitive Way we will find that the decads dealing with this part of the journey lead us

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step to the vision of the apprehension of the Godhead, the Arut-perum-jothi, by our Swaamikal.

The next twelve decads, from the 26th to the 37th, 132 stanzas in all, are petitions of various sorts, no matter what the titles of the decads are; all of them, however, lead us step to the denouement that is the conferment of the Arut-perum-jothi, the great Effulgence of Grace, on our Swaamikal.

"Bestow on me a sweet way of life" is the theme of the 26th decad, appropriately called "Decad of Saying: Bestow Sweet Way of Life". He sings:

Oh Might in the heart of the thundering sky!
Oh Lord Who bestowed on me
a power filled with the light of gnosis!
Oh Lord Who protect the great sages!
Oh God Who put up with my offences
and bestowed a boon on this slave!
Oh Fruit of truly great thavam!
Oh Lord of a nature
which the Aagamas and the Vedas cannot gauge!
Oh unique One in the Hall in Thillai!
Do graciously bestow on me a sweet way of life!

3730. VI.26 inittha vaazhvu arul enal 1

Bestow on me a good way life!
* * *
Bestow on me a great way of life!
* * *
Bestow on me a way of life
Endowed with everything!
* * *
Bestow on me a supreme way of life!
* * *

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Bestow on me a gnostic way of life!

* * *

Bestow on me a pure way of life!

* * *

Bestow on me a way of life free of fear!

* * *

Bestow on me a sweet way of life!

* * *

Thus ringing changes on the same petition, our Swaamikal devotes an entire decad of ten stanzas praying for a sweet way of life. This petition is not for his selfish ends but for the purposes of the mission he has to fulfil on earth.

He is seized with a great longing to gain the great effulgence of grace, and, in the next decad, the 27th, he gives voice to this longing. He sings:

It is fair that the pure ones who sing Your praises
should quail in their minds
and quiver with fear
in the very fibres of their bodies
and lose heart
whenever they hear all the perfidious designs
of the vile ones with worm-infested heads
who, having wasted all their time,
are disappointed (in their desire to gain You)?
Do thwart all those designs
by Your unique effulgence of grace
and graciously establish,
the (Creed of the) Pure True Path!

3754, VI.27 thiruvarul vizhaithal 15

It would seem that the Satya-gnaana Sabhai has already been established by our Swaamikal at Vadaloor or that the idea of establishing such a

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Sabhai has germinated in his mind, for all the stanzas of the next decad end with the refrain, "Oh unique great Lord of the Satya Sabhai!". This decad (the 29th of the Sixth Book) as well as the six which follow describe the mounting intensity of the desire for union. We shall see only a few stanzas from these seven decads and hurry on to the "Decad of Amazement at the Blessings received". Our Swaamikal sings yearningly:

Oh Sire,
I, of perfidious mind,
tormented by unceasing misery and troubles,
and desirous of Your Mercy,
have come and stand before You,
You should say to me; "Fear not",
and enslave me,
Oh Father, I do not know anyone but You,
Oh King at Vadaloor
Who bestow grace on those
who seek refuge with You,
Oh unique great Lord of the Satya-Sabhai!

3771. VI.29 ciruchabhai vilakkam 2

There is a quality of poignancy in the stanzas of the next decad which has been rarely matched in any of the decads that have gone before. Much as I desire to restrict the number of stanzas to be reproduced here from each decad, I will be robbing you, dear reader, of the opportunity and joy of knowing some of the best of our Swaamikal's songs if I omit, for instance, any of the stanzas I reproduce below from the 32nd decad, the "Decad of Asserting; "I Will Never part From You". Our Swaamikal sings:

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Oh Father,
why should I tell You several times?
If you do not extirpate all my fears and misery
and, hurrying up, do not deign
to come to me on this earth this very moment,
and fulfil all my aims
and accept me,
I shall , without fail, give up my life;
I swear this, I swear;
may Your twin feet know this,
Oh Lord of compassion,
Oh true Succourer
Who are food and drink and succour to everyone!
Oh dancing King
of benignantly blissful pure effulgence of grace!

3801. VI.32 piriyen endral 1

The next four stanzas are very well known songs sung by a large number of Devotees of God. They are also found in many anthologies. One of them has been reproduced in the first chapter of this book, but will bear repetition in the present context. Our Swaamikal sings:

Suffer misery any longer I cannot,
suffer I cannot, Oh King,
all that I have suffered will suffice,
do now extirpate my fears
and, taking my body, life etcetera all to Yourself,
be pleased to give me in return
Your body, life, etcetera - all of them,
Oh Lord Who dwell in the Hall of Gnosis
to the north (of Vadaloor)!

* * *

Oh Lord!
Am I not one of the long line
of the holy galaxy of devotees

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who have come down the ages
like banana shoot from banana stem?
The how of it I know not.
The misery this wretch suffers,
has it the assent of Your divine will?
Is this fitting?
Is this just?
Is this righteous indeed?
Oh bounteous Lord
Who dance on the Golden Hall set with gems!
Son to You am I not?
And legitimate father to me are You not?
This craven world's soul-searing grief
I can no longer endure!
Graciously bestow on me Your benign light;
graciously bestow it right now!

3802, 3803, VI.32 piriyen endral 3, 4

"This is the moment, this is the right moment for uniting with me" is the refrain of the 33rd and 34th decads.

I have crossed all the forests;
reaching the city,
I have seen to the delight of my eyes
the sight of the golden ramparts
of Your beautiful city;
I saw the remarkable sight
of the entire fortress being decked with flags,
I shed all my failings
at the outer doors of Your temple;
all my instruments of knowing
(the five sense-organs),
having lost all their mischief,
are under my control;
I have gained all the mystic powers,
I am singing songs galore

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in the Hall of Gnosis;
Oh my Spouse, this is the right moment,
do graciously blend with
and fill my mind
Which gives me strength!

3820. VI.33 civa tharisanam 10

It has been said; "Knock and it shall be opened unto you. For ..... to him that knocketh it shall be opened". Our Swaamikal knocks in the 35th decad of the Sixth Book. He sings:

That I might eat of the ambrosia
of undying grace and rejoice,
Oh Nataraaja
surrounded by the King of snakes,
Oh Only One, Oh Bhavan,
Oh transcendent One,
Oh transcendentally transcendent One,
Oh our Civan,
open the door!

Our Swaamikal knocked, and, as promised in days of yore, the door was opened to him. He sings:

Oh father,
I called upon You, saying:
"Haven't You come to know all my suffering?",
and You, without disregarding me,
came that very moment,
took me up in Your arms, embraced me,
and, touching my head, gladly said:
"Fear not, my Son,
We will not part from you even the least,
part from you We will not;
We have given all to yourself
the large multitude of mystic powers
that you may shine in this world".

3847, VI.36 pettra petrinaiviyatthal 6

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Here are some astounding statements, some unique claims which set apart our Swaamikal from the other saints of Tamilnaadu with one exception. This exception is Maanikkavaachakar who made equally remarkable statements, though of a different nature. He sings:

Behold Eesan Whom everyone is entitled to apprehend!
Behold Civan Whom even the devas do not know!
Behold Him with the aspects of the male, the female and the neuter!
Behold him whom I saw with my eyes!
Behold the ambrosia which yields grace in abundance
note that I saw the greatness of his mercy!
(for) behold he walked on earth with his rosy feet for my sake
note that I was convinced that He was Civan
note that He, in his Grace, enslaved me!
Behold him who has her with eyes like the blue lotus as a part of Him
Behold simultaneously Her and Him

Our Swaamikal has reached with these songs of his a very definite stage in his journey on the Unitive Way. There will be no more any reversal, any turning back, any doubt or despair. This 36th decad, is thus an important milestone on the long long way towards the Godhead.

The next four decads, the 37th to the 40th, are in the nature of thanksgiving to God for the great boon, He had conferred on him. He sings:

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Oh great Life Who dance
on the resplendent Hall of Gnosis!
Oh lustrous Great Effulgence of Grace!
Oh Being shining within that Effulgence!
Receive in Your holy ear
my petition which fills my thoughts
and bestow Your grace
that this body of mine liable to decay
may this very day turn
into a never perishing gracious form.

3856. VI.37 azhivuraa arulvadiva-p-peru 5

You bestowed on me the great effulgence of grace
that no sooner than I could think in my mind
'let the dead arise'
they should rise laughing (out of the bier)
on this earth;
and, giving me a form indestructible by any means,
You seated Yourself inside me!
Oh Dweller in the Hall of Gems,
how true is the power of Your great grace!

3868 VI.38 perarul vaaimaiyai viyattal, 6

In nineteen more stanzas our Swaamikal sings a Te Deum for all blessings conferred on him.

In the 40th decad he bursts forth into ecstatic rejoicing thus:

I have abandoned all kinds of perfidy
I have quaffed greatly of the flood
that is Your grace,
I see inside my mind
sights never before seen,
Oh Dweller in the famous Hall,
after gaining serfdom unto You,
I have beheld You in the dawn of my life,

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I revel in bliss on the Highway of the Good Path,
I have gained the boon
of not dying on this earth,
Oh only One Who dance on thathvam,
after becoming a slave to You!

3892. VI.40 aanandha anubhavam 1, 2

The decad has been appropriately named "Experiencing Bliss".

With the 24th decad of the Sixth Book (with which ends our Swaamikal's journey on the First Stage of the Unitive Way) cease all self-accusations, self-denigrations, weeping and wailing. Even petitions cease. The later decads are sheer paeans of praise of the Lord. The decads from the 41st onwards to the 80th, forty decads in all are even more of this character than the foregoing decads of the Sixth Book. These again can be divided into two sections, one comprising 17 decads, from the 41st to the 57th and the other comprising 23 decads from the 58th to the 80th, the latter's distinction from the former being that the decads in that section are cast in the naayaka-naayaki bhaavam, the Bride and Bridegroom relationship. If the reader will cast back his mind to the several sections into which the decads of the Thiru Arutpaa have been divided for interpretation, he will note that the culminating decads of each of these sections have been cast in naayaka-naayaki bhaavam. This is as it should be. Our Swaamikal sings ecstatically in lilting words, impossible to translate, about the God Who has united with him. From the cadence of the

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words, we will not be far wrong if we presume that our Swaamikal must have danced while he composed and sang the stanzas of the 41st decad.

Describing what the sacred feet of Nataraaja are, he sings:

Innumerable are the large galaxies of undying words
wherein are contained
millions and millions of worlds;
all of them, put together,
are as a millionth part of an atom
in the presence of the heavenly sacred feet
at the moment of their dance
on the resplendent Golden Hall,
so say (those who know),

3924. VI.43 thiruvadi nilai 1

Maanikkavaachakar sang a decad on the beatific vision of the Lord which was vouchsafed to him in Thillai. He sings:

I, cur of a serf, saw with delight
in beauty-encompassed Thillai
the sweet-tasting feet of Him
Who abides in Thirupperunthurai
the feet of Him Who, entering me at a time
when I had not (even) taken shape (in the womb),
established Himself in my mind
and, reforming me in my embryonic state,
entered my flesh
and assumed lordship over me out of His grace!

Thiruvaachakam, decad 31, stanza 2

Our Swaamikal sings three decads on a similar vision he was vouchsafed. He sings:

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The Knower (of everything),
the Intellect behind the intellect (of man)
Which intellectualises,
the Great Effulgence of Grace,
the Possessor of all my love,
He Who is eminent
as the omnipotent Will,
He Who parts company with those
who take to mean ways,
the loving great Lord
Who has blended with my mind,
He Who has extirpated my cycle of births,
He Who took hold of me and enslaved me
without spurning me,
He Who is my Father,
I behold Him
and abide rejoicing therein.

3934. VI.44 kaatchi-k-kalippu 1

We must not forget that all these visions are visions of the God within. This is made clear in the next decad wherein our Swaamikal gives expression to his amazement at the manner in which God entered his mind and took abode therein. He sings:

While the heaven-dwelling Brahmas and Vishnus
and others
performed great austerities for many days,
and, saying; "Do graciously place Your sacred feet
on the honey-laden flower-bed
in the marble room in the mansions of gems",
stood aggrieved (when You did not do so),
You forcibly entered the hut I live in,
and, besides bestowing even on me
the goodly sacred ambrosia,
You entered with pleasure
even into my hut made of flesh

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and, furthermore, entered the small hut
called my mind.

3984. VI.47 ulampukuntha thiram viyatthal 1

Maanikkavaachakar too is oftentimes lost in wonderment at his good fortune in the Lord vouchsafing him a grace denied to others. He sings for instance:

While the flower-seated Brahma
and he who lies on the raging sea (Vishnu)
and Indra and others waited,
You cleansed me of my faults
and, showing me Your tinkling anklet-girt feet,
said; "Take these as Your goal",
and added me to Your band of devotees.
.....

Thiruvaachakam, 23, 8

"Who is there to prevent Him" is the refrain of one more decad of amazement sung by our Swaamikal at his good fortune. He sings:

"By sex is He a male,
or a female indeed,
or a thing of dual sex,
or a sexless thing?
Is the way of gaining Him one or two?
Is He beginningless
or has He a beginning,
what furthermore is there of Him?"
A Chief Who exists
with the Vedaantha saying like this about Him,
He took abode in the heart of me,
a fellow with a deluded mind,
Who is to prevent the munificent One?

3997. VI.48 varambil viyappu 4

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Our Swaamikal has on many occasions prayed the Lord to graciously accept and wear the garland of poesy strung by him. He will be making this request again in some of the forthcoming decads. But, nevertheless, he records in the 52nd decad the gracious acceptance of his garland of poesy by the Lord. We have seen in past decads the record of the fulfilment of other petitions of our Swaamikal. These decads are milestones on the way our Swaamikal trod in his pilgrimage to the Godhead.

The Lord not only accepted the garland of poesy but praised it whole-heartedly. Our Swaamikal places on record the Lord's appreciation in several songs in the same decad.

The next decad is, of course, a decad of praise, of amazement, but with a difference. Its title is the clue to this difference.

In the 53rd decad our Swaamikal sums up in eleven stanzas what Gnaana-Chidambaram stands for. At the same time, this decad records the experiences which our Swaamikal had at this stage of his spiritual journey. As he goes along the Path he garners experiences of higher and higher order.

Maanikkavaachakar, after beholding the Bridegroom in all His glory, with all His special ten insignia, (cf., decad 19 of the Thiruvaachakam) asks of the Lord "What kind of a service You want from us?" He sings:

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"That It is the savour of fruit,
that It is ambrosia,
that It can rarely be known,
yet is so easy of access,
even the Immortals know not;
Oh Dweller in Uttharakosamangai's honey-exuding groves
Who have assumed sway over us
and have, out of Your grace, come hither
that we may declare:
"This is His sacred form, this here is He!",
how would You like us to serve You?
We shall pay heed to that.
Our mighty Lord,
do, in Your grace, rise (in my heart),

Thiruvaachakam, decad 20, thiruppalliezhuchchi 7

It is noteworthy that in exactly similar circumstances of spiritual experience, our Swaamikal too asks the Lord "How shall I serve You?"

Oh Lord of the glorious etherial shrine of gnosis,
bestowing on me unsatiating ambrosia,
and raising me to a state of bliss
through Your love,
You made me Your favourite child;
I am now endowed
with all the exquisite experiences of bliss;
do graciously choose and let me know the work
this youngster should do
in this world of never-ending (misery)!

4065. VI.54 cey-pani-vinaval 9

Two decads earlier our Swaamikal asked the Lord what service He has for him to do. In the 56th decad be sings what, at first sight, is another vinnappam but what is in reality the Lord

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answering his question. In eleven remarkable stanzas the Lord lays down an elaborate programme of work for our Swaamikal. Since our Swaamikal has again and again claimed that he does nothing but what the Lord does through him and speaks nothing but what the Lord speaks through him, we are perfectly right in assuming that in this decad the Lord speaks through our Swaamikal.

Though our Swaamikal seems to pray for many many things in the eleven stanzas we must not overlook the fact that each of these stanzas end with one and the same petition. The petition of petitions, a petition for eternal union with the Godhead. It is only while waiting on earth for this union that our Swaamikal wants to occupy himself with service to humanity. It is, of course, not as a pastime that he wishes to do this. On the other hand, it is his mission on earth, it is the mission assigned to him by God. Nevertheless, the significance of this decad lies in the fact that it is a heart-rending plea for eternal union with the Godhead.

"Would God listen to this prayer of prayers", our Swaamikal seems to doubt for a moment. But, immediately he recollects all the blessings, boons and benefits which had been conferred on him in the past and recounts them in no less than one hundred stanzas, ending each with a plea to accept him in the garland of poesy, particularly the latest garland strung by him in the last decad. It is in this decad (the 57th in the Sixth Book) that the famous

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song representing God as a shade-providing tree, its shade, fruit mellowed in the shade and so on appears, a song made important by the specific mention of the day on which God deigned to enslave him. Our Swaamikal sang this decad, probably, in his late forties, perhaps, at about his 49th year, after arriving at Karunkuzhi from Vadaloor, a very short period, not more than a month or two perhaps, before singing the famous Arut-perum-jothi-akaval, the song for which the preceding 56 decads are but forewords. Immediately after this decad (the 57th) our Swaamikal is going to revel in 23 decads in naayaka-naayaki bhavam, in the role of the bride of the Lord. We will not be far wrong, therefore, if we say that this decad sums up all the spiritual experiences of over thirty-six years, if we exclude the first nine years of childhood of our Swaamikal's life. Of course, he did not sit down to write down in chronological order the innumerable acts of grace of God, the intimate experiences never given to others either in their intensity or in their variety. Moved by the spirit of God, our Swaamikal breaks into spontaneous song and sings what comes to his mind at the moment. I have attempted to analyse the 100 songs and classify them and it is according to this classification that I shall take you through this decad. There are songs of sheer praise of God too. This is as it should be. For the favours showered on our Swaamikal by God are unique and no amount of praise of the Lord can ever be adequate or too much. Our Swaamikal begins this decad thus:

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Oh Lamp of Grace!
Oh Flame of Grace!
Oh Bliss of the Effulgence of Grace!
Oh Ambrosia of Grace!
Oh Plenitude of Grace!
Oh Being of the Form of Grace!
Oh Spouse Who, extirpating the darkness (of ignorance) have occupied the whole of my mind!
Oh my Wisdom!
Oh my Life!
Oh Kin dear to me!
Oh great Gem Who have extirpated my delusion!
Oh God not susceptible to any assay!
Oh Bridegroom Who dance on the Hall in Thillai!
Oh holy Lord Who bestowed Gnosis on me!
Oh Lord of the Form of Gnosis!
Oh divine dancing King!
Do graciously accept the poems composed by me!

4090. VI.57 arul-vilakka maalai 1

The earliest experience which our Swaamikal records in this decad is the unique and ineffable one which occurred to him in the 5th month of his infancy. This book begins, as the reader will remember, with that incident.

The next significant event recorded in the stanzas of this long decad is the spiritual marriage, the mystical marriage of the human bride, the devotee, with the divine bridegroom, the Godhead. He devotes six stanzas to this event. In the very second stanza of this decad he sings of this marriage, and, what is remarkable, mentions the day on which this marriage took place. I shall merely repeat the poem here for record and pass on. Our Swaamikal sings:

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Oh cool Tree
which offers me a chance of refreshing
myself in the summer!
On Shade under the tree!
Oh Fruit mellowed in the shade!
Oh Water of sweet savour trilling in a brook
nearby!
Oh fragrant Flower of sweet smell
blossoming amidst the delightful water!
Oh gentle Breeze blowing on the plaza!
Oh Bliss born of the breeze!
Oh Benefit inherent in the bliss!
Oh Bridegroom Who wed me on the full-moon day in Chitrai!
Oh King Who dance on the Hall in Thillai!
Do graciously wear my garland of poesy!

4091. VI. arulvilakka malai 57

At about the same time, or, more probably, a little later, the Lord, unable to bear the sight of His beloved going without food, graciously came in the form of our Swaamikal's sister-in-law or in the form of the divine Mother Herself and fed the child asleep on a pial.

From the experiences of adolescent youth, our Swaamikal goes on to record the experiences of early manhood. The most outstanding of these is the birth of compassion in him.

God prescribed not only a list of don'ts to our Swaamikal but gave him a list of dos as well.

We see from the 92nd song of this decad that the president of the Pure Universal True Creed was

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no one else than Lord Nataraaja Himself; our Swaamikal sings thus:

Oh Great Being gained by me in the dawn of my life!
Oh Delight!
Oh sweet Fruit mellowed in the core of my mind!
Oh Unique Spouse
Who on one single day
bestowed on me in the Dharmasaalai (at Vadaloor)
all the highly useful produce
which accrue to a person through thavam performed
in the past and in the present, or in one single life!
Oh Treasure seated as the President of The Society
(for the propagation) of the Universal True creed!
Oh my King of the great dance
Who dance wearing a garland of words,
the best among garlands!
Do wear my garland of words also!

4181.VI.57-92

The ultimate findings of all religions may be found in the sacred Etherial Shrine of Gnosis, but it does not necessarily follow that all sects and creeds are therefore good or perfect. The Lord therefore instructs our Swaamikal in this matter and these instructions are recorded in five songs of this decad.

We now come to the last one of the experiences recorded in this decad. Our Swaamikal recalls with amazement and joy his being elevated to a seat set with gems. There is a similarity in experience between Mannikkavaachakar and our Swaamikal in this respect. Mannikkavaachakar sings:

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"While those who were intent on gaining You
were wide awake in this world,
You graciously set a seat for me,
and to this cur showed
things never been shown (to others),
and, moreover, enabled me to hear
things never before heard (by others),
and, protecting me from being born again,
enslaved me.

Thiruvaachakam decad 5 stanza 28

In three more places in his work, the Thiruvaachakam, Maanikkavaachakar refers with awe and pride to God giving him a seat of honour.

We see from these utterances of Mannikkavaachakar what a great honour is this of being provided with a seat by God in His Assembly (of devotees). Our Swaamikal too had a similar experience which he records in three stanzas of this decad. He sings:

Oh Spouse
Who, bestowing clarity on this youngster
who stood perplexed
not knowing in which direction to go,
and raising him to a high seat set with gems,
made him gain the state of the grace-filled bliss
while men of good thavam
who do not know any desire
and others stood surrounding him
and rejoiced!

4148 VI. arulvilakka malai 57 - 59

Our Swaamikal is now ready for the highest of all possible acts of grace, the crowning glory of the long years of thavam, the conferment of the

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Effulgence of Grace. He prefaces his record of this greatest of experiences with three songs of praise of the Lord as the Effulgence of Grace.

The Lord, out of His munificent grace, bestowed on our Swaamikal the very power by which He Himself exercised sovereignty over all the worlds. That power is the Great Effulgence of Grace. Our Swaamikal records in the 90th stanza of this decad the conferment of that unique power on him. He sings:

Oh my Spouse who told me
"It is possible to know the Being
spoken of by all the reputed ultimate findings
of unfailing Vedaantha, Siddhaantha etcetera
with the aid of the Great Effulgence
which is grace incarnate
by remaining established unwaveringly
in the Pure Blissful True Creed;
it is not possible for any one to know It
by any other means;
this is My Will;
Oh My Son,
you, of course, have received
the Great Effulgence of Grace:
blessed be you!"
Oh King dancing on the Hall!
Do graciously wear my offering too!

4179. VI. arulvilakka malai 57-90

Thus saying, the Lord said "Never doubt my words, have no fear", and blessed our Swaamikal. He records this assurance in the 91st song of this decad thus:

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Oh Principal Being of my livelihood
Who graciously told me;
"Have no doubt about it, my son;
in this very birth
you have gained whatever has to be gained,
have no fear",
and Who, establishing me on top of the world,
crowned me with a gem-set crown,
and said: "Blessed be you"!
Oh pure blissful Ether
of pure Effulgence of Grace!
Oh Joy-incarnate!
Oh unique Spouse capable of doing everything!
Oh unique dancing King
Who showing (to the world) the way of redemption,
dance on the Hall of Gems!
Do graciously wear my (garland of) words also!

4180. VI. arulvilakka malai 57-91

Thus ends the tale of all the major acts of grace done to our Swaamikal since his infancy by God. There are, however, miscellaneous acts of grace which have not found a place in any of the songs so far seen by us. Our Swaamikal recalls with love and gratitude all of them in fifteen songs scattered throughout the decad.

Forty-one of the 100 stanzas of this decad are songs of sheer praise of God. As the reproduction of all or many of those stanzas will not serve any useful purpose with respect to our following our Swaamikal on his journey on the second stage of the Unitive Way, I content myself with quoting only one of them which is very popular with all devotees of God in Tamilnaadu. That song is this:

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Oh Delight
Who graciously bestow delight
on the learned and the unlearned!
Oh Eye
Who bestow sight
on those who do not see (You)
and on those who behold(You)!
Oh Boon
Who bestow boons
on the strong and on the helpless!
Oh Wisdom
Who bestow wisdom
on those who do not esteem You
and on those who esteem You!
Oh Impartial One
Who abide impartially
with the good as well as the wicked!
Oh Well-being
Who bestow well-being
on the humans as well as the devas!
Oh Bliss Who dance on the Hall in Thillai
for the sake of all!
Oh my King
Do graciously wear the song which I utter!

4128.VI.57-39

Two important claims are made by our Swaamikal in this decad. He claims that God conferred on him the power to raise the dead. This is a claim which can be believed and accepted. Saint Thirugnaanasambandhar, Saint Thirunaavukkarasar and Saint Sundarar, all three of them have raised the dead not merely from their graves but from their very ashes. Moreover, they raised such dead not immediately after death but after the lapse

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of quite a long time, and in one case several years. It is the other claim which baffles my understanding and the understanding of many others including Thiru Doraiswaamy Pillai, the doyen of commentators, and the commentator of the Thiru Arutpaa. This baffling claim is that of being given by the Lord the power to exercise the five functions of creation, sustenance, destruction, concealing, and bestowing mukthi. These are, as far as is known, the sole prerogative of God. In fact, the various schools of thought in Hinduism including the Saiva Siddhaantha are agreed that the human soul on gaining deliverance approximates to the parabrahmam in every respect except in the matter of discharging the five functions, panchakrityas. In any case, as far as I have been able to find out, none of the biographers have recorded that the Swaamikal ever exercised these powers or, for that matter, ever raised the dead, though there are one or two uncorroborated stories current to that effect.

I pass on reluctantly from the 57th decad, the arul-vilakka-maalai, the Garland of Poesy Expounding the Grace of God, to other decads. I would fain linger longer here, but the remaining 1729 stanzas of the Thiru Arutpaa forbid me to tarry any more here. The next twenty decads are songs of sheer exultation cast in the naayaka-naayaki-bhaavam, the role of the human Bride and the divine Bridegroom.

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The conclusion of every important stage of our Swaamikal's journey on the Pathway to God has been characterised by his bursting out into exulting songs in the role of the Bride of the Lord. This second stage on the Unitive Way is no exception to that tradition. These decads are important not so much as records of our Swaamikal's journey as showing the intensity of his burning love for the Lord. The Bride's mother relates the piteous condition of her love-lorn daughter.

The Bride asks the Lord to instruct her in the truth about Him. Maanikkavaachakar too entreated the Lord to appear before him as He really is. He sang:

Oh transcendent Effulgence Who rise in my mind
and, closing the outlets of the crafty five senses
which, at cross purposes with me, delude me,
make ambrosia well up in me!
.....
Do graciously come
that I may see You as You truly are!

Thiruvaachakam decad 22 V. 1

It is noteworthy that Maanikkavaachakar addresses the Lord as "Transcendent Effulgence". Our Swaamikal too, at a similar stage of spiritual experience calls upon the Lord to instruct him in the truth about Him. He sings:

Oh my Eyes!
Oh Pupil of my eyes!
Oh my Mind!
Oh my mind's Fruition!

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Oh Heaven!
Oh Fulness of Heaven!
Oh Bliss!
Oh unique true Being!
Oh bright Moon which yields cool grace!
Oh Treasure of compassion
Who gave me to the world!
Oh inner Light
which arises in the interior (of my mind)!
Do graciously tell me the truth
(about Yourself)!

4253. VI.63 gnaanopadhesam 1

The Lord in the Etherial Shrine, in Chidambaram, is the dancing Lord, Lord Nataraaja. Our Bride sings, therefore, of His dancing feet in the next decad. She sings exultingly:

The dancing Feet, the Feet that dance on the Hall!
the dancing Feet, the Feet that dance eternally!
the Feet sought for by the praising Vedas!
the Feet which taste sweet to devoted devotees!
the Feet gained by seekers of great thavam!
the Feet which are the Lord of the Kingdom of Onkara!

The Feet which bestow grace on me just as wished for!
the Feet which placed me in a never dying state!
the Feet which become the property of the Virtuous!
the Feet which will never abide in the minds of the false!

4321, 4333. VI.68 aadia paatham 1, 13

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Fulfilling her ardent prayer, the Lord comes to her, and she welcomes Him most joyfully in 104 stanzas.

From dancing with the Bridegroom to embracing Him is but a natural and logical step. In the next decad, the Bride invites the Lord to embrace her.

The next two decads, the 79th and the 80th are in the nature of preludes to the great orchestration that is the Arut-perum-jothi-akaval, a decad of 1596 lines, the longest ever sung by our Swaamikal or, for that matter, by anyone else. These two decads, the 79th and the 80th, are sheer paeans of praise of the Great Effulgence of grace. Any translation by me is bound to make base lead of the pure gold that these decads are. Quite enough has been translated so far about this Great Effulgence of Grace and a great deal more will be translated shortly. I have decided therefore, not to translate any of the stanzas of these two decads.

The 32 stanzas of the 79th decad and the 29 stanzas of the 80th decad may be said to be a precis of the great Arutperum-jothi-akaval. The Jothi, the Effulgence, spoken of here as well as in the 81st decad, the Arul-perum-jothi-akaval, is none else than the Godhead, the parabrahmam, conceived as Lord Nataraaja of Thillai.

That Lord Nataraaja is the theme of these decads is more than evident from the Jothi being

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characterised in these stanzas as Chidambaram Jothi which we may roughly translate as the Effulgence at Chidambaram.

The stanzas of the 79th decad end with a refrain which is transliterated below. The sound of it will give even to a foreigner to Tamil an idea of the ecstatic state in which our Swaamikal sang this decad. The refrain runs like this:

Civa-civa civa-civa jothi-civa
civa-civa civa-civa civa-civa jothi;
civa-civa civa-civa jothi.

Civa is the Tamil name for the transcendent being, the God-head. At the same time civa means bliss, well-being. Primarily the refrain means "Oh transcendent being Who are the Effulgence". But, unlike English, words in Tamil poetry are always interpreted in as many ways as possible, lending richness of meaning to the verses. Here, too, therefore, civa-civa jothi should also be taken to mean "blissful, blissful Effulgence". The refrain of the 80th decad runs thus;

jothiyul jothiyul jothi-suddha
jothi civa-jothi, jothiyul jothi,
jothiyul jothiyul jothi.
Oh effulgence within an effulgence,
within an effulgence!
On goodly jothi, Oh Effulgence
Who are the transcendent Being,
Oh Effulgence within an effulgence!
Oh Effulgence within an effulgence,
within an effulgence!

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In the course of writing this book. I have attempted to fix a date for many events which are like mile-stones on the Pathway to God which our Swaamikal trod. I have myself noticed some discrepancies. This is inevitable as I am basing my surmises on subjective evidence. However, as far as the date of our Swaamikal attaining jeevanmukthahood is concerned, I am confident that I will not be far off the mark if I put it at a date earlier than the establishment of the Satya-dharmasaalai which occurred on the 23rd of May 1867.

This decad, the 81st of the Sixth Book, was sung on 18-4-1872. It is sung by our Swaamikal from the spiritual pinnacle of identity with the One reality, of jeevanmukthahood. He speaks with the authority of a soul which has gained deliverance here and now while still living in the physical body on earth. It is incorrect to say that he speaks, for a jeevanmuktha does not act on his own volition. God acts through him, speaks through him. This decad ranks in this sense with the Upanishads. It describes the indescribable. It speaks of the immanent and transcendent God, and of the Godhead that has transcended conception by the mind or expression by speech. This is as much a revealed scripture - a short one no doubt - but an unmatched scripture not only in the Tamil language but in any language whatsoever. The reader should wait for four or five years for an English translation

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of this decad. However, an elaborate commentary in Tamil has been published. Perhaps this is the first ever complete commentary on this decad. Here we shall make only a brief survey of this great work of our Swaamikal.

The first 437 couplets and the last eleven couplets out of a total of 798 couplets end with the refrain 'arul-perum-jothi', 'The great Effulgence of Grace'.

Other couplets end with various other refrains. In the first 168 couplets our Swaamikal sings a paean of praise of the great Effulgence of Grace interspersed with references to acts of Grace done unto him by the Great Effulgence of Grace. The Great Effulgence of Grace sung by our Swaamikal in this decad abides in the etherial space called the Hall of Gnosis. In all probability, the song was sung in the temple at Chidambaram. This decad may have been sung in the temple at Chidambaram, may be in the very presence of Lord Nataraaja Himself, but it will be a sad mistake if we imagine that our Swaamikal was addressing a God-without, a God abiding externally in some actual or imagined space, etherial or earthly. The jeevanmuktha has imprisoned God in his heart, in every fibre of his body.

It is our very great good fortune that we have the entire manuscript of this decad in the handwriting of our Swaamikal. The manuscript is written on 47 pages of half-foolscap size paper. The

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pages are numbered in Tamil numerals. The words, written very legibly in bold slanting strokes, reveal a personality of great firmness of character coupled with a remarkable self-assurance. No erasures or corrections mar the manuscript. This shows that the Swaamikal was writing of something with which he was perfectly acquainted and about which he had no doubts or misgivings. The decad begins with an invocation of Arut-perum-jothi, the Great Effulgence of Grace:

arut-perum-jothi ! arut-perum-jothi!
arut-perum-jothi ! arut-perum-jothi!

Maanikkavaachakar also conceived the Godhead as Jothi. In Civapuranam itself, the first decad of the Thiruvaachakam, when he begins, the paean of praise in the 62nd line, he begins with the phrase, 'maasattra jothi', 'Oh Immaculate Effulgence!' and in the very first decad of bridal mysticism, Thiruvempaavai, the seventh decad in the Thiruvaachakam, he refers to the Lord as 'arum-perum-jothi', 'the rare to gain Great effulgencee'. I am tempted to imagine that the phrase was originally 'arut-perum-jothi', 'The great effulgence of Grace', and that in common with the fate of many manuscripts that the word 'arut' had got transformed into 'arum'. Moreover, in the decad called 'Arut-patthu', the decad of grace, he begins the first stanza with the pharse, 'jothiye! sudare! soozholi vilakke!', Oh Effulgence! Oh Flame! Oh Lamp of Encompassing Light!'. Abiraami Bhattar

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lived engulfed by this very effulgence, so much so that when the king of Thanjaavoor rudely woke him up from his nirvikalpa-samaadhi and asked him what day of the month it was, he promptly replied that it was full-moon day while actually it was the new-moon day! The greatest concept of the Godhead can be but two, the Onkaara or the cosmic (soundless) sound and the Effulgence. Contemplatively steeped in the blaze of the nirvikalpa-samaadhi, the contemplation where "it is no longer some thing poured out of God into a created subject, so much as God living in God, and identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but God living in God", see the Godhead as the Effulgence. This is the experience of jeevanmukthas, but few ever leave a record of their experience of "God living in God".

Raamalinga Swaamikal is one of such few who have apprehended the Reality and have left an account of it. The arut-perum-jothi-akaval is the account of the Reality he apprehended. If nothing of the work of Raamalinga Swaamikal had existed except this decad in blank verse, even so the world would have acclaimed him as a great seer.

After the invocation, he continues to praise and thank the Effulgence of Grace which is the Godhead in 167 couplets. A significant fact comes to light in these couplets. The Great Effulgence of Grace is conceived as abiding in the etherial space

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which is the Hall of Gnosis. If we throw our memory to the first spiritual incident in the infancy of our Swaamikal, we will remember that he addressed the Lord thus:

Oh Being, my true kin,
Who showed me everything
as the (space and time transcending) ether
instead of the usual ceiling
when I, in my infancy,
along with my mother and others
witnessed in the sacred town Thillai
(the Mystery of mysteries)!

4133, VI. arulvilakka malai 44

This ether is the etherial region of gnosis. Several decads later, after reaching jeevanmukthahood, our Swaamikal sees the Effulgence of Grace which is the Godhead in the same etherial region. He sings:

Oh Effulgence of Grace
Who are my Spouse of mercy-laden bliss
abiding in the grace-imbued great state
on which rests the Creed of grace-laden bliss!

* * *

Oh Great Effulgence of Grace
Who stand on the crown of the Vedas
and on the crown of the Aagamas,
and soar upwards!

* * *

In fifteen couplets (169 to 183) the Godhead is meditated upon as immanent in the five elements, ether, wind, fire, water, and earth. The Thiruvaachakam of Maanikkavaachakar has the following lines:

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Obeisance to You Who pervade the earth
as all the five elements!
Obeisance to You Who appear in water as four!
Obeisance to You Who shine in fire as three!
Obeisance to You Who delight in wind as two!
Obeisance to You Who happen in ether as one only!

decad 4, lines 137 to 141

Our Swaamikal sings:

Oh Great Effulgence of Grace
Who as Ether within the ether,
as Ether amidst the ether,
intimately fill it!

* * *

Oh Great Effulgence of Grace
Who as Wind within the wind,
as Wind amidst the wind,
are supremely forceful!

* * *

Oh Great Effulgence of Grace
Who as Fire within fire,
as Fire amidst the fire,
are famous as heat!

* * *

Oh Great Effulgence of Grace
Who as Water within water
as Water amidst water
serve as Mother!

* * *

Oh Great Effulgence of Grace
Who as Earth within earth,
as Earth amidst earth,
function to produce all those!

169, 171, 173, 175, 177

The phrase "all those" appearing at the end of the last stanza among those quoted above stands

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for water, fire, wind, and ether. Earth has five qualities, firmness, taste, heat, energy and pervasiveness. Water has four (other than firmness), fire has three, heat and the rest, wind has energy and pervasiveness, and ether pervasiveness only. Hence, it may be imagined that water and the rest were created out of earth. We are reminded here of Maanikkavaachakar's poem where he sings:

Oh Effulgence of diffusive light
Who, sprouting as the earth,
the celestial world, and the entire universe,
pervade all of them!
.....

Thiruvaachakam, decad 22, stanza 8

Couplets 184 to 201, 202 to 215, 216 to 230, 231 to 246 and 247 to 256 deal respectively in great detail with the Great Effulgence of Grace pervading each of the five elements and giving each its special quality. The central theme of all these couplets is that the Great Effulgence of Grace is indeed everything and that apart from It nothing exists. We are reminded of Mannikkavaachakar saying:

No particular thing You are,
Apart from You, none are!
Who can indeed know You?

Thiruvaachakam, decad 22, stanza 7

The Great Effulgence of Grace is the creator of the three flames and of all the functionaries of creation, sustenance, destruction, withholding of knowledge, etc. It is the ordainer of the seas, the mountains, numbers, seeds and produce.

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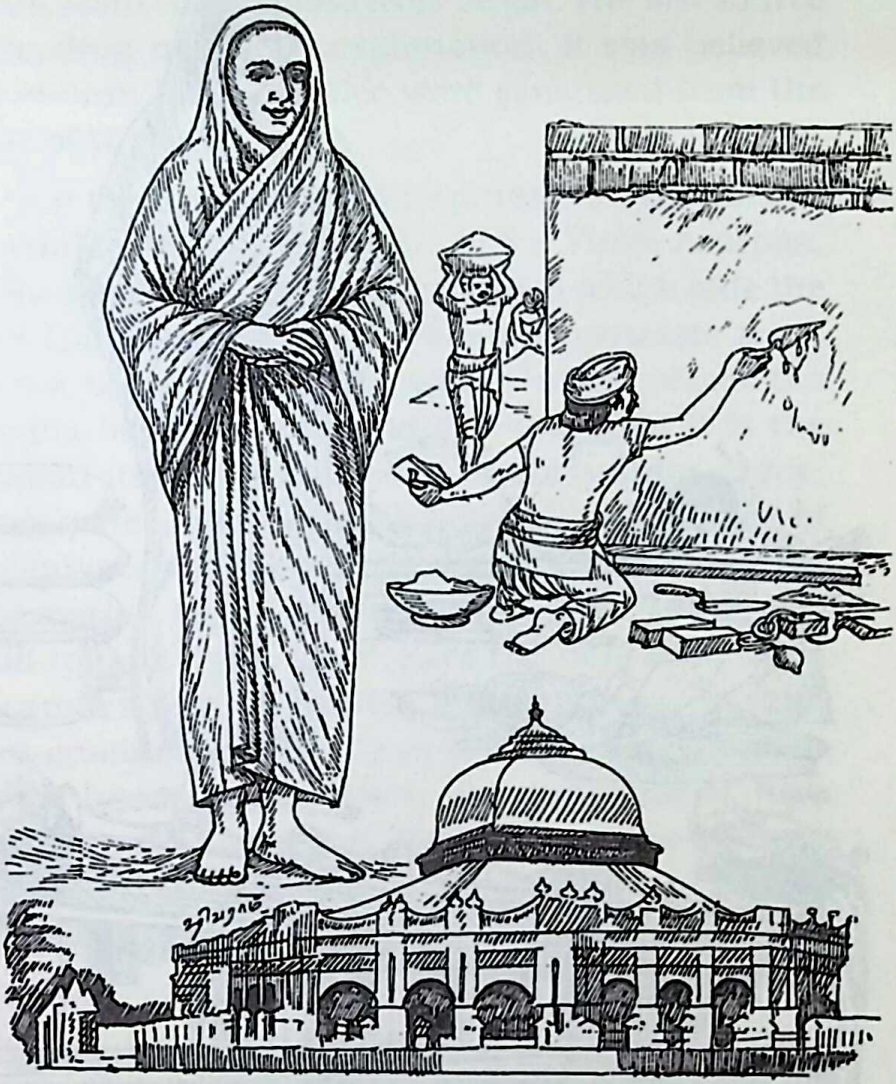

Building Gnana Sabai

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Dharmasala - stove eternally lit

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The origin of living creatures (including plants) is said to be four-fold. From the earth, from the uterus, from the egg, and from sweat. The last source of breeding needs an explanation. It was believed that vermin like head-lice were generated from the sweat of the body.

For the first time in the spiritual journey of our Swaamikal, for the first time in the Thiru Arutpaa, our Swaamikal refers to the curtains which hide the Great Effulgence of grace from unregenerate man. It is not some extraneous agency which places the curtains between man and the Godhead. It is the Godhead itself which does so out of infinite mercy, for no unregenerate man may look on the face of the Godhead and survive. It has been so from time immemorial. "And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God" says the Holy Bible. Our Swaamikal later installed curtains in the Satya-gnaana-sabhai in front of the flame of the lamp which he set up there to represent the Effulgence of Grace. Our Swaamikal sings of these curtains in ten couplets in the decad.

If and when the curtains are drawn back, the seeker after the Reality will be endowed by the Effulgence of Grace itself with a doubt and delusion-dispelling clarity in which he will see all the universe in the Great Effulgence of Grace in all the universe. Our Swaamikal sings of this clarity in twenty four couplets. He sings:

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Oh Great Effulgence of Grace
Who severing the link with maayai,
which is the cause of being born,
display out of Your grace
Your prowess!

Oh Great Effulgence of Grace
Who, rescuing me from aanavam (ignorance)
and all the rest,
show compassion to me!
Oh Effulgence of Grace
Who bestowed on me the power
of raising the dead
at the Very instant of my saying "Rise!" to the dead!

417, 419, 436

From the 440th couplet onward our Swaamikal sings of various facets and aspects of the Godhead. He sings of the Godhead as the Reality, he sings of Its transcendental nature, of its various states such as the attributeless state, etc., he sings of it as the merciful Guru, as Mother, as Father, as the soul's Kin, as the soul's Friend, as the soul's Succourer. 160 couplets cover these aspects of the Godhead. He sings of the Godhead as Sat, Chit, Aaananda - Reality, Knowledge, Bliss - in 45 couplets. In Indian thought, the Godhead is conceived as mani, manthram, oushadham - the Gem which gives whatever is wished for, the magic Formula of similar powers, the Medicine for the disease of birth and death. Our Swaamikal devotes 23 couplets to these aspects of the Godhead. Moreover, to him It is Gold which baffles all attempts at assay. It is

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undiminishing Treasure, It is a Mountain of Effulgent Light. It is the Sea, the Woods, the Flower-bowers, the Shade, the Zephyr. It is sweet Water, It is Coconut-water, Coconut-milk. It is the Nelli tree's Fruit, It is the Jack-fruit, It is Honey, It is Ghee, It is Fragrance, It is sweet Music, It is Song, It is one's eyes, It is one's wisdom. He revels, like the love-lorn Bride he is, in conceiving of his Spouse as everything in heaven and on earth, and as even things that are not there. It is the eternal light, It is the full-moon, It is love, It is the benevolent rain. It is the Effulgence of Grace.

Arut-perum-jothi! Arut-perum-jothi!
Arut-perum-jothi! Arut-perum-jothi!

"Do experience all the mishaps which beset the creatures of the earth that you may remove them". Here, in these words, lies the key to our Swaamikal's confessions of faults and foibles, lust and lechery, misery and mortification, passion and compassion, the key to the hundreds of songs which have puzzled me.

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11. THE UNITIVE WAY

This chapter comprises the experiences described in the last 62 decads of the Sixth Book, from decad 83 to 144. The 82nd decad, arut-perum-jothi-ashtakam, eight stanzas on arut-perum-jothi, the Great Effulgence of Grace, correctly belongs to the last chapter. Like other books of the Thiru Arutpaa, this book also contains a miscellany of stanzas collected in a decad, the 125th, under the heading, 'thani-t-thiru-alangal', 'Sacred Garland Strung with Odd Flowers'. This decad does not really belong to the main theme of this section of the Thiru Arutpaa which is revelling in the bliss gained by integration with the Godhead till it is time to shuffle off the mortal coil. This is the content of the 1,000 and odd stanzas. The 142nd decad, anubhava-maalai, 'The Garland of Experience', is the crowning piece of this section, and within its 100 stanzas are crowned all the spiritual experiences, all of blissful character, which a seeker has in that period of his life which falls between jeevanmukthi, that is deliverance while still continuing to live in the human body, and videhamukthi, ultimate and irrevocable deliverance on disembodiment, on shedding the physical body. We shall feast on all those 100 plates of rare fare provided for us by our Swaamikal. We shall also partake liberally of other delicious fare provided in other decads.

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'Enfolded in the Bliss of the Godhead' is the title of the 83rd decad. The Bride, ensconced in the lap of her Spouse, the Godhead, sings in a transport of bliss:

Oh Eye Who bestowed exclusively on me
the Reality-seeing eye of gnosis
that whatever You had in mind
may be clear to me in a moment!
Oh my Mother, Who, raising base me
me who was roaming about like a bull
in the forest of the senses
to a high state
and making all the world pay homage to me,
ordained that You and I should be one!
Whenever I bear in mind Your mercy
and meditate on it,
my heart melts and melts into water
and, joining the great stream of desire,
merges in the great flood of love
without leaving any trace of a distinction
of I and THAT!
Ah! Ah! Ah!

4629. VI.83 irai-inba-k-kuzhaivu 3

'The Unattainable Boon' is the name of the 84th decad. A devotee of God never gets over the amazement at his good fortune in receiving the grace of God. He never thinks, even for a moment, that he got it as of right. In this frame of mind, our Swaamikal sings:

Oh my loving Gnosis! Oh Grace-laden Being!
Oh Mother! Oh my Father!
Oh my Sire! Oh my King!
Oh my Ambrosia
Who, deeming even me a worthy thing,

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bestowed on me Your bliss-laden great grace
that I may propagate the True Creed
to the end that all the miserable people of the world
may forsake the evil path
and become possessed of joy!
Oh my Kin!
Oh Succourer dear to me!
You are in me
and I am exultantly abiding in You!
Who, indeed, could gain here this oneness?

4639. VI.84 peraa-p-peru 5

Having gained the unattainable boon of oneness with the Godhead, our Swaamikal is steeped in bliss of integration with the Godhead and sings:

Oh Great Effulgence of Grace!
That all the souls may get rid
of the taint of dark ignorance
and, perceiving the transcendent state of mukthi
here itself on earth,
live joyously,
that the deluding many many paths
may be covered over by dust
without leaving any trace of track or trail,
and that the clarity-invested Pure True Path alone
may resplendently prevail,
You made me dance in the Street of Grace
where can be seen the Assembly of Gnosis!
You are indeed my Enslaver!

4653. VI.85 civaanandhatthu azhunthal 9

The reader would have noticed in the songs in this chapter a remarkable absence of agitation, anxiety, doubt, despair, despondency. All these have been left behind for ever. There is about these decads

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a serenity, a sense of contentment, a sense of achievement without the usual accompanying pride, a sense of bliss everlasting. The songs of the 93rd decad bear testimony of this.

Out of the supreme confidence arising from taking up attachment to the Bliss that is Civan, our Swaamikal confidently declares that he will no longer suffer misery. He, moreover, declares: "I have become You" - 'naan thaan aanene', 'Naan' means 'I', 'thaan' stands for God in Tamil devotional literature; 'aanene' means 'became'.

In the next two decads our Swaamikal reminisces with gratitude on past acts of grace of the Lord.

Joy, jubilation, exultation, ecstasy, characterise all the 62 decads of this last section of the Sixth Book which we are now considering. They abound in grateful reference to several acts of special grace, various kinds of them, of varying significance and importance. All the stanzas of the 99th decad refer to only one act of grace, an act of grace of the highest significance, a boon unparalleled in the experience of the mystics in any country of the world, in any period of the world's history. That boon is the privilege of discharging the five functions of God, namely, creation, sustenance, destruction, withholding knowledge and bestowing grace (mukthi). I have said before and I repeat that all the systems of Philosophy in India and elsewhere hold these powers to be the sole prerogative of God,

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powers which cannot be, have not been, and are not delegated to a human being. Yet our Swaamikal, who has made passing reference to this boon in some of the previous decads, now devotes an entire decad of ten stanzas to the subject.

We have heard frequently of the golden form bestowed on our Swaamikal: it has been discussed and debated upon elaborately in the third chapter of this book. I refrain, therefore, from reproducing any stanza from the 101st decad which, though it bears the title, 'The Boon of the Golden Form' has only one stanza, the 15th, in which the phrase 'pon vadivam', 'golden form' occurs.

We heard our Swaamikal declare in the 100th decad that the Lord designated him as His son. With that blessing fresh in his memory, our Swaamikal admonishes his mind to behave properly or bear the consequences. The mind goes under four names in Indian philosophy, namely, mind, intellect, will, and I-ness. These four are called collectively antahkaranam, interior instruments of knowing. The mind receives the picture or impression of a thing or happening, the intellect examines it, the will determines what it is, I-ness appropriates of the knowledge. Our Swaamikal addresses all these aspects of the mind in the 102nd decad.

Maan or prakrithi maayai, maayai, maamaayai, and thirothaayee, i.e., all the factors which, according to Civa-siddhaantha, contribute to a soul being embodied and being born on earth, are

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threatened similarly with dire consequences unless they cease bothering him. For, as a jeewanmuktha, our Swaamikal has transcended birth and death. Sleep, fear, anger, hunger and death itself are similarly challenged and, so to say, exorcised, for is he not the Son of God!. Addressing Death, he sings;

Oh great thieving great sinner of a fellow called Death!
Crossing the earth and the heavens
and other regions,
and crossing the great dark vast territory
which envelops all the above like an armour,
perish without leaving any trace of even your essence!
If you stay here another moment,
I will kill you in a sanguinary manner.
This, indeed, is the gracious command
of Him Who owns me.
I exorcise you in the name of my Guru;
run, leaving me who am well protected!
Take note, I, indeed, am the Son
who have apprehended
the Lord of the Great Effulgence of Grace!

4853. VI. 102 thatthuva-vetri 20

The title of the decad from which the above poem has been quoted is 'thatthuva-vetri', 'Victory over the thatthvas', the thatthwas being the 24 components of which the human body is composed. These are, the matrices of the five elements, the five elements themselves, such as, earth, water, fire, wind, and ether, the five organs of perception such as the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and skin, the five organs of action, such as, the genital organs, hands,

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feet, anus and mouth, the four instruments of knowing, such as, mind, intellect, will, and I-ness. Though our Swaamikal reproves the last four only in the 102nd decad, we must assume that he reproved all the rest and brought them under his sway. With this conquest over the thatthwas, our Swaamikal is ready for the mystical marriage of the soul with the Godhead.

Students of the Thirutthondar Puraanam, more well known as the Periya Puraanam, the hagiography of the saints of Tamilnaadu, will recollect that the wedding day of Thirugnaanasambandhar was also the day of his deliverance, his liberation from the bonds of birth and death. We will see towards the end of the next chapter that this was the case with Raamalinga Swaamikal too. We will see in the decads which follow, the decads from the 104th to the 144th, the last in the Thiru Arutpaa, that they are sung in a state of blissful anticipation of the day of the mystic marriage, the day of final deliverance from the bondage of birth and death, in anticipation of the day of vidhehamukthi, the day of the release from the "attenuated shell of the differentiated ego", the day of gaining the famed 'maranamilaa-peru- vaazhvu', the deathless great life, the day of gaining amritvam. In a similar context, Maanikkavaachakar prefaces his stage of the journey to the Godhead with a decad of 'taking refuge in God', Our Swaamikal too takes refuge in God. The sub-title of Maanikkavaachakar's decad is 'Ripeness for Deliverance'.

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"The Lord Comes, The Lord Comes", announces the Swaamikal to his mind in the next decad. The last lines of several of the stanzas of the decads which follow lend support to my surmise that the last 38 decads of the Thiru Arutpaa (from the 104th decad of the Sixth Book onwards) are sung in eager anticipation of the day of final deliverance. Our Swaamikal sings;

This, indeed, is the moment of our Father's coming,
note that there is no doubt about it;
fear not, fear not;
tell that this is the truth
to all those in the world
that they may be relieved of their weariness.
Not an iota of blemish will attach itself to your words,
(for) this is the command of my Lord!
Delighting in the form
of perfect great light of holy grace,
it is certain that we will raise the dead,
with every creature, whoever they are,
in this world, in the heavens,
and in regions beyond the heavens
adoring us;
do realise this, Oh my mind!

4875, VI.105 irai varavi iyambal 1

In this state of elation, our Swaamikal sings the next decad 'The Decad of Auspicious Rising from Bed'. Maanikkavaachakar has a similar decad in his Thiruvaachakam. It is significant that this decad comes after the 'Kuyil-patthu' and the 'Thirutthasaangam'. In the first of these two decads,

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the Kuyil, love-lorn maid's winged messenger, is asked to go and invite the Lord to come. One of the songs is:

Oh Kuyil small that does frequent
the grove with honey-sweet-fruit!
Do listen to this!
The bounteous Lord Who, spurning the heavens,
entered the earth and made man His own,
the only One Who, disregarding the flesh,
entered my heart and my sentient life became,
the Bridegroom of Her
Who won Him with gentle eyes that excel the fawn's
do bid Him come hither!

Thiruvaachakam, decad 18, stanza 4

Invited by the Kuyil, the Lord comes in all His pomp and glory. The parrot, the pet of the love-lorn maiden is the herald who announces Him, proclaiming one by one His ten distinguishing insignia such as His name, His country, His capital city, the principal river of His country, the mountain of His country, His steed, His weapon, His drum, His garland, and His flag. The decad called Thiruppalliezhuchchi now follows.

Let us turn back to our Swaamikal's decad, 'Thiruppalliezhuchchi'. We note the remarkable coincidence with a similar decad of Maanikkavaachakar. Just like that decad, this too follows the decad of 'The Lord's Coming'. It is not necessary to labour the point that the God-Without has become the God-Within, in the most esoteric

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manner ever possible in God-realisation. It is in this context that the following song from this decad should be understood. Our Swaamikal sings:

The day has dawned,
the delicate lotus called my heart has blossomed,
golden light has flooded everywhere;
I stand before You paying obeisance to You;
You should tell me all the work I should do.
Oh my mighty true Guru,
Oh primevel One,
Whom all the Aagamas and the Vedas
declare as the Whole!
Oh rare Great Effulgence of Grace
impossible to portray!
Oh my father!
Do graciously rise (in the lotus that is my heart)!

4885. VI. 106 thiruppalliezhuchchi 1

God has heard the petition. He has risen in the heart of our Swaamikal. The joy of our Swaamikal cannot be restrained. He jumps with joy and sings:

Saying:
"The night is past,
the twin feet have been gained,
I praised them in song and rejoiced!"
bounce for joy!
Saying:
"I fed on the ambrosia of milk!"
bounce for joy!

4895. VI. 107 thiru undhiyaar 1-3

Let us take note of the words, "I fed on the ambrosia of milk". What is this ambrosia of milk? It is no other than the milk that confers gnosis, the same milk on which Saint Thirugnaanasambandhar was fed by the Mother of the Universe, the same

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milk that gave him his name - Gnaanasambandhan, he who has gained contact with gnosis. That this ambrosial milk is the milk that confers gnosis will be evident from the various blessings which our Swaamikal declares that he has gained. One of those blessings is 'dawning of gnosis' in his mind. We will see all this from the remaining stanzas of this decad which are reproduced below. Our Swaamikal continues:

Saying:
"The day has dawned,
the golden feet I gained,
them I adored and rejoiced",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"I became immaculate:,
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"Sleep has vanished,
the sun has appeared,
I am rid of the aching (of the heart",)
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"I fed on the sweet ambrosia",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"Misery has been got rid of,
sleep has vanished,
bliss I have gained",
bounce for joy!

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Saying:
"My ambition has borne fruit",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"Gnosis has dawned,
the Onkaara is sounding,
I am rid of my grievance",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"I beheld the Hall of Gnosis",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"The curtain has fallen,
the red flame has appeared,
the light of Sakthi is moving up",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"My pooja (worship) has borne fruit",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"The inner darkness has been dispelled,
the inner light in me is mounting up,
I ate of the limpid ambrosia",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"I ate it enjoying its sweetness",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"I saw my Father,
and surmounted all Obstacles,

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I delighted in my mind",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"I gained the mystic powers",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"I met my Father
and got the boon of immortality,
I rejoiced in my mind",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"I am skilled in all the mystic powers",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"Mukthi I gained,
and by that mukthi
I arrived at the FRUITION OF GNOSIS",
bounce for joy!

Saying:
"I became a Siddhan",
bounce for joy!

4895 to 4904. VI. 107 thiru undhiyaar 1 to 10

The decads which follow, seventeen of them, from the 108th to the 124th are all sung in a mood of great exhaltation, I had almost said, in a mood of great frenzy. Wonder, joy, contentment, peace, characterise them. Thus he sings in the 108th decad of the great wonderful things that have happened to him.

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Wonder, wonder indeed,
wonder of a grace, wonder indeed!
....
The feet that are gnosis,
the golden feet, their glory alone shines forth,
the festive day
of playing with the mystic powers has dawned;
stone-hard heart of mine has lost its heaviness,
the false scriptures learnt by me
were forgotten in a moment,
wonder, wonder indeed.....

The day when the dead will rise has come,
the Code of Bliss has sprung up everywhere,
it has enveloped all the spheres
from this earth to the heavens,
it has given me the boon of deathlessness,
wonder, wonder indeed.....

4905, 4906, VI.108 arul arbhutham 1, 2

For sheer joy the next decad is unsurpassed. In 90 couplets our Swaamikal adores the King in the Etherial Shrine. One of the couplets, I remember learning when I was five years old. Young and old used to sing this couplet and several others with great gusto. If my memory does not play me false, one of my uncles used to cut capers while singing this song. As a matter of fact, this decad is intended to be sung so. Though this couplet is the third in the decad, this is the couplet with extracts published in anthologies begin. For that matter, the title of this decad is taken from the commencing phrase of this couplet. We may also head our extract with the same couplet. Translation of this couplet or any other couplet from this decad will kill the very joy of it.

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Most of the couplets are composed of four invocative phrases. For instance, the couplet I am speaking of means:

Oh King of the Etherial Shrine! Oh rare Medicine!
Oh blissful Honey! Oh Feast of grace!

I shall reproduce in transliteration this couplet and a few others and pass on to the next decad.

ambala-t-thrase! aru marunthe!
aanandha-t-thene! arul virundhe!
pothunata-t-thrase! punniyane!
pulavarelaam pukazh kanniyane!
malai tharu makale! mada mayile!
mathi-muka amuthe! ilangkuyile!
aanandha-k-kodiye! ilam pidiye!
arbutha-t-thene! malai maane!

The first two out of the four couplets quoted above invoke Civan and the other two invoke Sakthi.

civa-civa civa-civa chinmaya thejaa!
civa-sundhara kunchitha nataraajaa!
nataraajan ellarkkum nallavane!
nalla elaam seyya vallavane!
sankara civa-civa maadevaa!
engalai aatkola vaa! vaa! vaa!

* * *

"Oh Sankara! Oh Civa-Civa! Oh great Lord!
come, come, come to enslave us!"

is the meaning of the last-quoted couplet.

The next decad too is a decad of invocation. Sambo-Sankara is its title. We shall sample two of the couplets.

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akara-sabhaapathi! cikara-sabhaapathi!
ananga-sabhaapathi! kanaka-sabhaapathi!
makara-sabhaapathi! ukara-sabhaapathi!
varatha-sabhaapathi! saratha-sabhaapathi!

amala-sabhaapathi! abhaya-sabhaapathi!
amutha-sabhaapathi! akila-sabhaapathi!
nimala-sabhaapathi! nipuna-sabhaapathi!
nilaya-sabhaapathi! nipita-sabhaapathi!

5163, 5164.VI.114 sambo sankara 8, 9

Six more decads of praise, adoration, follow. The first stanza of the last of these decads is a piece of adoration of the Effulgence, the Jothi. It runs:

jothi, jothi, jothi, jothi, suyan
jothi, jothi, jothi, jothi, paran
jothi, jothi, jothi, jothi, arut
jothi, jothi, jothi, jothi, civam!

Civan is the Effulgence, the self-generating Effulgence, transcendent Effulgence, Effulgence of Grace. These eight decads are relevant to our purpose in so far as they indicate the joy that fills the mind of our Swaamikal, fills it to overflowing, so fills it that he cannot contain it within himself but must break out in what may be called 'blabbering', 'pithatral' as it is called in Tamil.

The 121st decad, though one of exhaltation, catalogues for us the blessings which accrued to our Swaamikal. The decad is called *'kan-puruva-p-poottu'*, 'The Lock at the Junction of the two Eyebrows'. It is at this junction that aspirants for the apprehension of the Godhead are instructed to

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focus their meditation. It is at this junction that the '*aagnyaa-chakram*' is situated. It is one of the six centres, the sixth in the series, along which the *kundalini*, the serpent power rises from the *moolaadhaaram*, its resting place at a point between the anus and the genital organ, probably somewhere about the region of the prostate gland. Moreover, this '*kan-puruva-p-poottu*', the *aagnyaa-chakram*, is the locale of one of the three '*granthees*' or knots. They are called and situated as follows. The '*brahmagranthi*', is situated at the '*moolaadhaaram*', the '*vishnu-granthi*' is situated at the '*mani-poorakam*' or the area of the navel, the '*rudhra-granthi*' is situated at the junction of the eye-brows. These knots, or locks as our Swaamikal calls them, have to be cut or opened before the kundalini can travel up to the thousand-petalled lotus under the vertex. It is said that, with the opening of the lock at the junction of the eye-brows, an aspirant gains the immediate apprehension of Reality, of the Godhead. The first stanza of this decad announces the opening of the lock at the junction of the eye-brows. The other ten stanzas of the decad itemise the sights our Swaamikal saw and the blessings which followed.

The Hall of Gnosis and the Golden Hall became mine,
the devas and the Trinity talk only about me.
Why any more degradation in this momentary life?
My birth and misery, all have gone with this day!
My Sire's Reign of Effulgence has become mine,
the Vedas and the Aagamas talk about me only.

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Why any more degradation in this penurious worldly life?
All the misery of my birth has ceased with today!

5259 VI.121 kan-puruva-p-poottu 2

Elated by this spiritual conquest of the Kingdom of God, our Swaamikal orders the conches, the oboes, and the drums to be sounded in celebration of victory.

Blow, blow, Oh conch that He will never forsake us!
Blow, blow, Oh conch that He is the Lord of the Golden Hall!
Blow, blow, Oh conch that He made me give up the unreal!
Blow, blow, Oh conch that my worship has borne fruit!

* * *

Blow, blow, Oh conch that I gave up the unreal and moved away from it!
Blow, blow, Oh conch that I became a man of merit!
Blow, blow, Oh conch that I stood established in contact with the real!
Blow, blow, Oh conch that I beheld the Ether up above!

5269, 5284.VI.121 oothu, oothu, sange 1, 16

The next decad of 161 stanzas is a collection of odd songs on various occasions and collected together in this decad. These songs, as a consequence, do not fit in with the scheme on the basis of which we are tracing our Swaamikal's journey on the Pathway to God. Nevertheless, a few of the songs can be relevantly reproduced here. They fall under two categories. In some of them our Swaamikal records for posterity the great boons and privileges he received at the hands of God. In others, he admonishes unregenerate humanity and

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invites it to join him in gaining and enjoying the grace of God. He sings:

I said:
"Oh Bestower of boons!
do graciously put up with the evils done by me,
a fellow of paltry wisdom;
do not get angry;
liberally bestow on me today, right now,
the treasure of the Great Effulgence of Grace
and the rest!"

* * *

Graciously receiving these words in His ears,
God came and said:
"Fear not! We have given you today
the Great Effulgence of Grace;
rejoice exceedingly well!
Moreover, we have bestowed on you
the victory over death too!"

* * *

So saying, He came along and abode in my mind,
and, moreover, He blended with my soul,
and doing away with the worldly differentiation
of saying 'He', 'I',
He, the King of Chidambaram,
performed the divine act of becoming one with me!

5309, 5310, 5311.VI.125 thani-t-thiru alankal 14, 15, 16

The title of the 128th decad is "Relating What Happened (to me)" He sings:

Rid am I of misery!
I have abandoned all fears
which are now on the run!
All obstacles have I surmounted!
I am rid of the weariness of death!
I have crossed the sea of birth!
I spoke slightingly of it!

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I forgot the song of the Hall of Gnosis
which was ever on my lips!
I woke up in the transcendentally transcendental
region!
I hasten to sport according to my fancy!

5481. VI. 128 uttrathu uraitthal 5

The line "I forgot the song of the Hall of Gnosis" recalls to my memory Maanikkavaachakar's song, '*Thiruppadaiaatchi*' wherein he declares:

I will not worship the blossom feet
not known by even the heavenly ones".

When duality has ceased to exist, these otherwise praiseworthy acts also cease.

We should remember that our Swaamikal is singing these songs and those that follow at a stage nearer *videhamukthi* than *jeewanmukthi*. The days allocated by *praarabdha karma* are fast coming to a close, and the fewer they become the more intensely advaitic are the songs which flow from the heart of our Swaamikal. Thus, he sings the 129th decad called, "*Suddha civanilai*", "Pure State of Bliss", or "The State of Being Pure Civan". Our Swaamikal is no more Raamalingam, but Civan Himself. Maanikkavaachakar bears testimony to the utter truthfulness of this experience when he sings:

"Our I-ness perished and we became Civan
Himself!"

Thiruvaachakam, d, 11.v.4

Our Swaamikal sings:

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With my eye He blended, with my mind He blended,
with my thoughts He is ever blended,
with my songs He blended, with my soul He blended,
He blended with all these along with Mercy,
(the Mother)!

5487. VI. 129 suddha civa-nilai 1

It is significant that our Swaamikal states that the Lord blended with him along with Mercy. This is how it is. Maanikkavaachakar too bears testimony to this when he sings:

"Behold simultaneously Her and Him!"

Thiruvaachakam, d. 3, line 65

In this decad of 47 stanzas our Swaamikal reveals the most privileged relationship between him and the Lord. One is tempted to reproduce a dozen or two of these stanzas. He sings:

I think, and all my thoughts He fulfils;
I compose; making me compose,
He sings (dwelling in me);
I eat; He gives me limpid ambrosia
that my mind may become clear (of doubts);
the munificent Lord Nataraayan
takes delight in doing so!

* * *

All the words I utter
are words uttered by my Spouse,
they are not words uttered by me!
Oh countrymen!
Why will I utter anything?
Who am I!
Where is any special experience of gnosis
which I can call my own

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if Civan had not sought my flesh
and stood established therein?

5489, 5504.VI.129 suddha civa-nilai 3, 18

It is a remarkable coincidence of spiritual experience that Maanikkavaachakar sings:

Who am I! What worth is my mind?
What matters my learning? Who would recognise me,
had not the Lord of the heavenly ones enslaved me?

Thiruvaachakam, d.10.v.2

Compassion is the hall-mark of a *jeewanmuktha*, and our Swaamikal is, if anything, the very incarnation of compassion. It is not surprising, therefore, that moved by compassion, our Swaamikal devotes two decads, the 132nd and 133rd of the Sixth Book to importuning men of the world to mend their ways and seek the refuge of the feet of the Lord of the Etherial Shrine.

Our Swaamikal has stated in several places in the decads we have seen so far that he has gained the boon of deathlessness. But it is only now that, for the first time, he devotes a separate decad of as many as twenty-eight stanzas to this subject. "Deathless Great Life" is the name given to this decad by Ooran Atikal. Amateur and professional speakers on the philosophy of Raamalinga Swaamikal wax eloquent on this topic in season and out of season. Without being uncharitable, I may say that the more ignorant they are about what this type of life means, the more eloquently they wax on this topic. While there is an over-abundance of

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teachings of our Swaamikal, these orators pitch upon this particular belief of his to dilate on. When you come to think of it, his teachings will not suffer by the absence of this belief.

During the last thirteen months I have read, studied, digested, spoke, dreamed, eaten, slept the Thiru Arutpaa only. I have given hours and days of thought to this matter of deathless great life. I shall not write pages on this matter. For a man speaks or writes a lot only when he is uncertain of himself, uncertain within himself of what he is talking or writing about. By the grace of God, in all humility, I assert that this phrase does not refer to any life on this earth. When a person is born, the one and only thing he is absolutely sure about is that he will die one day. No astrologer is required to predict this. Let us be clear about what death is. It is the soul discarding the body which it has assumed for a time in order to work off its *praarabdha karma*. According to its level of spiritual evolution, it takes another body or is not reborn. As a result of my study of the passages in the Thiru Arutpaa relating to this matter of conquest of death, I have come to the conclusion that the phrase 'deathless life' refers to the state of the delivered soul not an Advaithist. We have seen how he pours scorn on those who claim, "I am Brahman", *'aham brahmaasmi'*. According to Caiva-siddhaantha, the soul is coeval with the Godhead and is equally eternal. It was not created by God, much less is it a creature out of the

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essence of God. Therefore, on gaining *videhamukthi*, deliverance after disembodiment, the soul is in a state of *saaujyam* with the Godhead. *Saa*=Him, *ujyam*=union; with the Godhead. But this is not merging in the essence of the Godhead losing all separate identity.

> *"God and man while remaining no doubt metaphysically*
> *distinct, are practically and experimentally 'one spirit'"*

When our Swaamikal speaks of the boon of deathlessness, he means that the union with the Godhead will be eternal and that there will be no more births in human body and therefore no more deaths. Let us translate this phrase of our Swaamikal into Sanskrit and it will be robbed of all its confusing and confounding qualities. The term corresponding to 'maranamillamai', death leessness, is amritvam. "Mrityo maa amritvam gamaya" says the Vedic invocation. From death lead me to immortality. Let me quote an illuminating passage from Aurobindo's book, 'Eight Upanishads' in this connection. In a note called, 'On Translating the Upanishads', he writes:

> *".....Again the Hindu idea of "immortality" is different from the European; it implies not life after death, but freedom from both life and death, FOR WHAT WE CALL LIFE IS AFTER ALL IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT DEATH"*

It is for this very reason that our Swaamikal lays so much strees on deathlessness, for once this

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is gained then there will be no life - life in this world, life in a human or other body. Therefore, if we do not want to be born again, we must conquer death, we must gain *maranamilaa-p-peru vaazhvu*, the deathless great life.

The '*anubhava maalai*', the 142nd decad, 'The Garland of Experience' is an elaborate treatise on this marana-milaa-p-peru vaazhvu, the deathless great life. After reading it I am concluding my research into the Pathway to God trod by Raamalinga Swaamikal with a chapter of the one hundred stanzas of that decad; no one will be left in any doubt about maranamilaa-p-peru vaazhvu. It is eternal union with the God-head.

Our Swaamikal proclaimed his *ekaagraha bhakthi*, his one-pointed devotion, to the Lord of the Etherial Shrine in the very beginning of his spiritual journey, and now on the eve of his *vidhehamukthi*, his *anthardhaan*, his vanishing from the sight of man, he reiterates it just as those who had gone before him did. He speaks as the Bride. Her companion tries to persuade her to be at least civil to other gods. She replies in ringing tones that she is not a subject of any of them. She sings:

Oh my companion!
You say: "Though the dancing Spouse who loves you
is your Husband,
yet, how is it
that you do not desire the friendship
of other devas

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who all rejoicingly come
when some people assemble
and chant the mantras seeking them?
Boon-bestowing Indras, Brahmas,
Naaranas, Kaaranas, and others,
to none of them I am a cringing subject.
Know that I am a subject
dedicated to the service of the Feet
Which dance a dance of lordship
in the sacred Etherial Shrine of gnosis!

5692. VI. 140 thozhikku urimai kilatthal 3

Concluding her address in the next decad, the 141st, the penultimate one to the greatest decad of the Thiru Arutpaa, our Bride describes her unique relationship with her Spouse and bids her companion decorate the mansion against the coming of her Spouse in the morning. She sings:

His body He gave to me,
His grace, His possessions, and Himself
He gave to me:
He will never part from me any more,
In my body He has entered,
He has blended with my soul
and dances (in my heart)!
This Lord of mine will come in the morning
and will graciously stay here.
Therefore, quickly decorate the mansion.
There is no doubt about this;
my unique Chief's word
is true, true, Oh damsel, true, true!

5704. VI. 141 thalaivi kooral 1

The Spouse comes with the dawn and the Bride sings her swan-song before she entered the

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nirvikalpa-samaadhi, the undifferentiated union with the Godhead, for ever and ever, and was never seen bodily again!

The ineffable experience of this union is related in the one hundred stanzas of the 142nd decad of the Sixth Book. Any reader who has travelled with me through the pages of this book, through the songs of our Swaamikal reproduced in this book, through the forest of comment and interpretation offered all along the chapters of this book, will not require any comment or interpretation for understanding this decad.

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12. ANUBHAVA MAALAI

(The Garland of Experience)

The Feet-blossom Which performs a sacred dance
in the Etherial Shrine,
I have worn it on top of the crown of my head:
with love I draped it over my dear soul too.
Oh my companion!
What shall I say of the fragrance of that blossom
which is wafted from my body too!
If you bid me tell you about it,
it is not within my ability to do so,
I am not speaking any falsehood;
come near me, take off the stopper from your
lovely nose
and smell and know for yourself!
The people in the countries
stretching from our beloved earth
to the region of the cosmic sound
have smelt it well
and have appreciated it saying:
"This, indeed, is fragrance!"

* * * * *

My eyes I will not close in sleep,
and even if I sleep,
I will dream only
about the union with my Husband
and rejoice in my heart,
Is it only in dreams?
In my waking hours too,
the Great Effulgence
that cannot be contained by thought,
my King,
He keeps on embracing me only
without noticing the passing of day or night
and makes me rejoice.

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"The earth may sleep, the mountains may sleep,
the encircling sea may sleep,
everything else on this vast earth may sleep,
but my daughter will not sleep".
My mother takes delight in speaking thus.
All other girls are feeling ashamed,
alas, they have not performed great thavam!

* * * * *

The omnipotent Monseigneur married me;
who in all the worlds are peer to me,
you tell me, Oh my companion!
Oh good girls, persons of great eminence,
Indras, great seers, Brahmas, Naaranas,
all standing up in heaven above say:
"It is impossible for us to describe the thavam
performed by this girl out of several (who perform
thavam)!
And several good people say:
"She has gained the privilege of marrying
the mighty Lord Who dances in the sacred city;
this girl here is, indeed, a smart girl!"

* * * * *

The Lord Who can do whatever He desires to do,
He has married me;
who, indeed, has performed the thavam I have
performed?
Listen to this, Oh my companion!
Will I think of, with my mind,
which thinks of my virtuous Lord only,
the deities of any sect whatsoever
as equal to even a piece of straw?
Think of me as a mad girl if you like!
Will I ever part from Him?
I cannot bear to hear it
even if someone talks of my parting from Him!
I witnessed the remarkable dance;
people say that if even a ghoul witnesses the
dance,

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it will not have the mind to leave the place;
what shall I say of the effect on me?

* * * * *

I donned the garland with delight
as bride to the Lord Himself
Who has no perfidy in Him;
the life without imperfections
which the Vedas along with the Aagamas,
describe in detail
is mine;
what, indeed, is the thavam performed by me?
Tell me something about it,
All my mothers,
who showed me menacing faces,
now show me composed faces
and are bestowing on me great honour.
Lasses of cotton-soft feet,
all of them, seated at my noble feet,
praise me, Oh my companion.
highly desirous of my acquaintance!

* * * * *

You call me to take food!
Oh my companion,
but, thinking of you (all the time),
I have already partaken of the honey
from the feet-blossom of the eminent Lord
Who dances in the Etherial Shrine!
To the sweet Ambrosia
which is the grace-filled fame
of the great Chief of unique lordship
Who dwells in me,
I added the juice of the sweet fruit called my love,
and the treacle
specially prepared from the sugar-candy
which is the vision of the form
of my unique Husband
and partook of the confection with delight;
(therefore) I do not feel even the least hunger
in my mind!

* * *

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People say that the gentle smile alone
which shines scintillatingly
on the face of my Lord Who dances on the Hall
is worth a crore of gold mohurs.
Is that all?
Even if they say, "several crores",
will that be a proper assessment?
Will the many many crores
of numberless kinds of spheres
spoken of by the four Vedas
which are ruled over severally by Sakthis and Saktas
be worth that smile?
The ambrosia of happiness
which wells up in my mind
whenever I think of the gentle smile
of that Lord of mukthi
is the worth of that smile!

* * * * *

When my Spouse
Who had blended with my eyes
linked His hand with mine,
I did not, any more, know myself
or my instruments of knowing.
Today I came to know
the stature of the Vedas
which say that all the enjoyments on earth
which you can think of
are (by comparison) but an iota
of the enjoyment of divine bliss.
Behold, Oh my companion,
whenever I think of the joy I experienced
on account of the cessation of the misery of karma
at the moment when the heaven-dwelling Lord of mukthi
blended with my soul,
the great enjoyment of the bliss
born of His blending with me

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began to engulf me (every time)
as if it happened at the very moment!

* * * * *

Oh damsel with tresses
bedecked with blossoming flowers,
at the moment
when I joyously partook of the ambrosia of grace
which my Spouse gave me
at the moon-lit bower on top of the tower,
I ceased to know me,
I did not know the world either!
It will be inadequate to even say
that it resembled a mixture
of rare-to-get sweet milk,
delicious treacle, ghee, and honey.
It is not possible to describe the peerless taste.
Oh my dear,
that ambrosia is equal only
to the golden feet of the Lord.

* * * * *

My body smells, all over, of camphor;
that, indeed, is the fragrance
which came of embracing the body of my Spouse!
Note that it is not a fragrance
which fades away like fragrances of this world.
There is a natural fragrance
to the form of God Who fills the Fourth State,
The people of the world
have never seen or known
the golden flower or the sweet fragrance.
While I was in close contact
with the holy form of the virtuous One,
I found that fragrance
all over that goodly sacred-ash-smeared form;
I united with THAT and became THAT!

* * * * *

(Translation of all the songs are available in the unabridged version)

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Our Swaamikal has not described this highly esoteric experience out of any pride or vanity. It is at the express command of Lord Nataraaja Himself that he has related this experience of experiences, the experiences in which the experience becomes EXPERIENCE itself. And God ordered him to do so out of His unbounded mercy that mankind may profit by this. Our Swaamikal places this fact on record in the following song. He sings:

I have related all this
by the sacred command of Him
Who, becoming an Illustration to the name 'Civam',
'Bliss',
performs the unique dance of bliss
on the great gem-set Hall of Gnosis
while plenty of devoted great gods
discharge all His functions (at His command),
and people whose thavam has borne fulfilment
pay obeisance to Him.

5814.VI.143 satthiya vaarthai 1

The one hundred and one stanzas and the four that follow were sung on the 30th January 1847, and concluded just sixty minutes before our Swaamikal vanished for ever from the ken of mankind. We should remember that, according to the Western calendar, a day begins at 12 hours midnight. In the four stanzas of the next decad, the 144th and the last in the Sixth Book as well in the Thiru Arutpaa, our Swaamikal swears to this. He sings:

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My Sire, my Monseigneur,
the Lord of my soul,
comes today and takes seat
at the place where I am.
In the two and a half naazhikais which follow,
he will blend with my grand body
and will abide in my heart
without ever departing therefrom,
By the strength of my great thavam,
I proclaim with full knowledge of what I am saying
"This is the truth, the truth indeed!"
Oh damsel with waist which resembles lightning,
my words will become clear to you
when two and a half naazhikais are past!

5818. VI. 144 satthiya arivippu 4

The journey of our Swaamikal to the Godhead ends here in the brahma-muhoortham, at the hour of dawn on the 30th of January 1874. And that day was a full-moon day in Thai, the first month of the uttharaayanam, the six months of the northern path of the Sun, which corresponds to the period between 13th or 14th January and the 13th or 14th of July. The Bhagavad-Geethaa says:

"Fire, light, day-time, the bright fortnight,
the six months of the northern path (of the Sun)
then going forth, the men who know the ETERNAL
go to the ETERNAL".

arut-perum-jothi! *arut-perum-jothi!*
thani-p-perum karunai! *arut-perum-jothi!*

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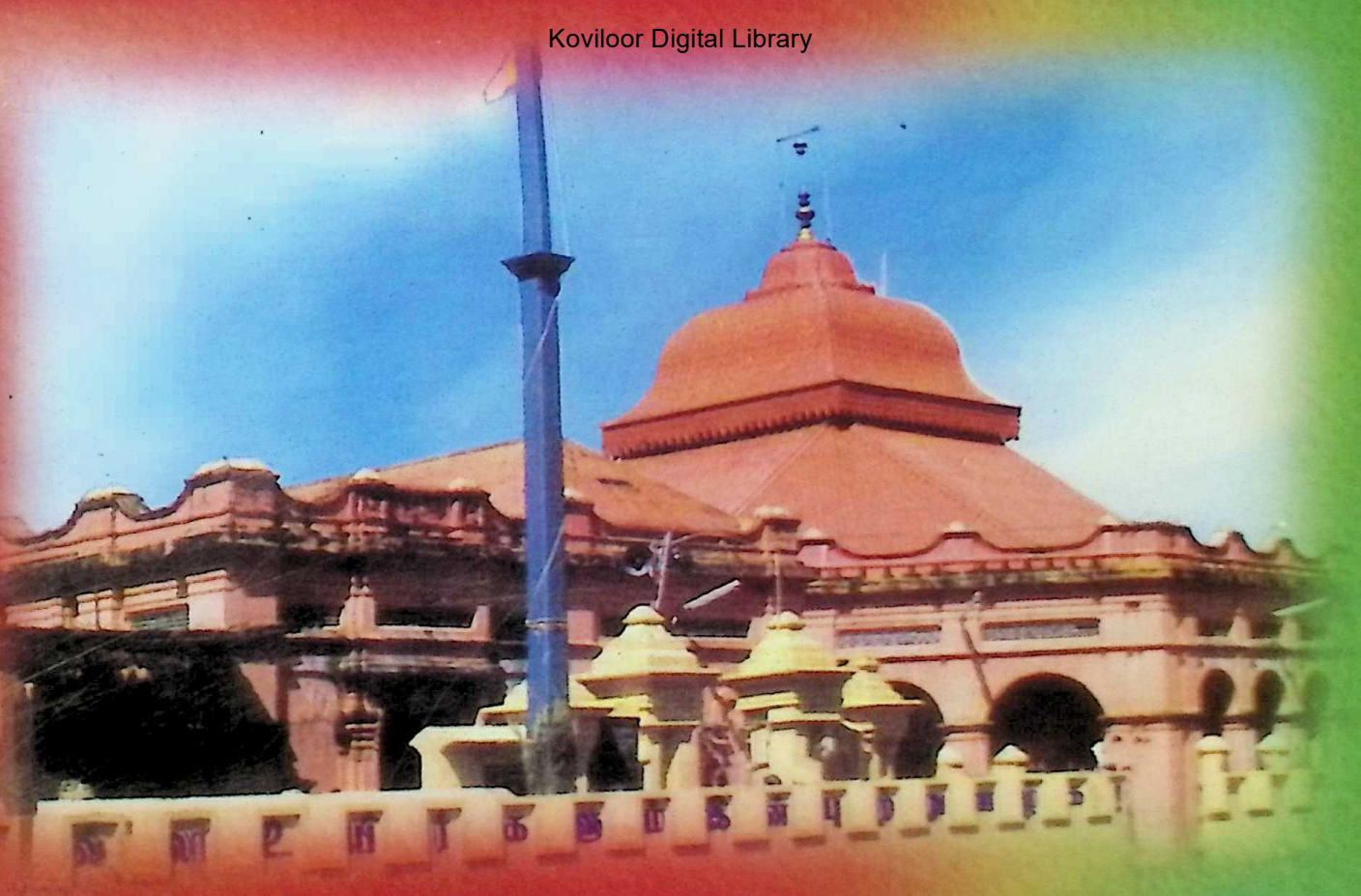
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